LITERARY GENRES IN TAMIL

(A Supplement to A Descriptive Catalogue of
Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Tamil)

By

A.V. Subramanian

General Editors
Dr. Shu Hikosaka
Dr.G. John Samuel

INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES
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FOREWORD

The Institute of Asian Studies envisages to prepare over the years an exhaustive Catalogue of all the palm-leaf manuscripts in Tamil, lying scattered in various parts of the world, in 30 Volumes. Obviously, the Tamil palm-leaf manuscripts would deal with a variety of literary topics belonging to various genres. The Catalogue's aim, being limited and confined to mere documentation, a supplement is necessary to elaborate on the subjects. This will help the prospective user to locate easily the manuscript of his interest. The supplement cannot claim the thoroughness of an encyclopaedia, but will be a pointer in the location of information, reducing the tedium of a haphazard and aimless .search.

The supplement has been prepared by Mr. A.V. Subramanian. The Institute records with gratitude the services of Dr. A. Thasarathan and Mr. S. Shanmuga Velayudham who have done the laborious work of seeing the manuscripts through the press.

Our thanks are due to the National Archives of India for extending financial assistance to bring out this monograph.

INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES

PREFACE

The Institute of Asian studies under the able and imaginative direction of Dr. John Samuel has conceived and designed a grand plan to publish 30 volumes of a Descriptive Catalogue of Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Tamil presenting details of all the available Tamil manuscripts anywhere in the world; it has already published three volumes and another is under preparation. It is a very ambitious scheme but a very necessary one to bring to the notice of intending editors and publishers the existence of classical works, many of them yet unpublished, whose publication will go to enrich Tamil literature.

During the course of discussions with the present writer, Dr. Samuel first conceived the idea of publishing a volume as a supplement to this series tracing the origin and development of the various literary genres in Tamil. The Descriptive Catalogue would refer to different Tamil genres during the course of its listing the features of manuscripts; and he thought that a volume specially devoted to a description of the forms used by Tamil poets and writers from the early beginnings of Tamil literature would be a valuable publication that can be consulted by intending editors of manuscripts. Apart from this use, such a work will prove of interest to the general student of Tamil as a study in itself; no such work has come out in English till now to fill these specific needs.

With characteristic expedition, Dr. Samuel drew the plans and estimate for the project and entrusted the writing to the present writer. He very kindly provided assistance to him in the shape of a qualified research assistant and a part-time typist. If the work has been completed in about seven months time, much of the credit should go to the Director and the officials of the Institute and

the two assistants working for the project who gave of their best for the successful completion of the project in time. For any errors of omission and commission, the present writer alone shall be held responsible.

A few words about the plan of the work may not be out of place here. A historical treatment of the development of genres seemed the best, as literary forms develop in time as almost every other human institution and a discussion done in the order of chronology would be most likely to point out this. An incidental advantage is that this work can serve also as a history of Tamil literature, owing to the chronological treatment adopted.

Even though this can be used, as stated, as a history of literature, the prime emphasis has been on the evolution and the development of genres. An instance can be cited here to show how the treatment varies on account of the emphasis. After dealing with the short poems of the *Caṅkam* epoch, this work examines the *Muttoḷḷāyiram* which is a collection of independent short poems very much in the mould of the *Caṅkam* pieces, before the Ten long Poems are taken up. This is on account of the genre affiliation of *Muttoḷḷāyiram* with the small poems of *Akam* and *Puṟam* of the Eight Anthologies and the Eighteen Later Works. In a proper history of literature, naturally, the entire *Caṅkam* literature would be considered prior to taking up *Muttoḷḷāyiram* which chronologically came slightly later.

Another difference, too, will be obvious. From the viewpoint of literary quality, the *Caṅkam* works, *Cilappatikāram*, *Cintāmaṇi* and Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam* should have occupied much more space and correspondingly, the minor *pirapantams*, much less space. But in a work devoted to a consideration of genres, the minor *pirapantams* have come to occupy quite a large space, out of all proportion to their literary importance; more than a hundred genres are involved and hence the pride of place had to be given to them. But even so,

all the *pirapantams* have not been dealt with in detail. In any case we have literary works composed in only some of them; in the case of many others no works have been composed; it is possible that in respect of some of the works did get written but have now been lost. As manuscripts that may be examined in the future may disclose works in some of these genres, a list has been furnished as annexure 4 to help the curious reader.

But the form of a literary work is very much influenced by the contents; in fact the form of poem is inseparable from its theme. For this reason, though epic poems form one genre, they have not only been divided into two different chapters under the titles "the Early epic poems" and "the Later epic poems" but in between the two, a chapter on hymnal literature has been interposed. This has been done despite the fear in the mind of the writer that it may cause a certain eddying effect, genrewise, in the reader.

The reason for this is two-fold. The later epic poems like the *Rāmāyaṇam* and the *Periyapurāṇam* arose chronologically much later than the hymns. And, more importantly, they were influenced powerfully by the *Tivviyap Pirapantam* and the *Tēvāram* respectively. Indeed, there could have been no *Periyapurāṇam* without the *Tēvāram*. Hence it was considered appropriate to discuss these epics after the hymnal literature, even though these epic poems show a great deal of structural affinity with the earlier epics and Kampaṉ clearly was much influenced by the *Cintāmaṇi*.

This work with its natural preoccupation with literary forms may, and often does, neglect to deal with certain individual works which may not offer any distinctive features to a student of genres. Many readers may find that some of their favourite works have been omitted here; this list of omissions must be alarmingly large in the case of modern literature where separate books of size comparable to this have been written on novels, short stories and literary criticism. The present writer hopes to be forgiven by these readers for

such omissions for the reason that this constitutes a study of the forms, not of the individual works.

In a study of literary genres, it was considered meet and proper that the principles of Genre Criticism, developed in the west in this generation are discussed in brief and applied to some of the major works in Tamil to show how they really operate in the assessment of literary works. Genre Criticism is very new to Tamil Nadu and the present writer has not been able to connect even a single essay dealing with it in Tamil. Hence it was thought appropriate that this interesting new device is introduced to the Tamil public through this work.

But it is a philosophical truism that the new inheres in the old; this new school of criticism, developed ten years after the Second World War contains some basic principles accepted tacitly by all creative writers from ages past. That the parts should be organically related to each other and to the whole is a basic principle in aesthetics - as true in sculpture and painting as in literature. What the west does - and this is not a contribution to be lightly dismissed - is to codify man's experience and induct generalisations and theories on its basis.

While this is true and will be widely admitted as true, the results of the assessment of certain literary works with the criteria of Genre Criticism may come as a shock to many. In extenuation, the present writer will have to make two observations. One is that Genre Criticism is not the end of all critical endeavour, it is only a viewpoint, though a valid one; there are certainly other criteria which if applied to those works may yield a different result.

The second observation is that we in India traditionally have been far too much taken up with the individual trees to think of the wood; and hence we badly need this revolutionary approach from the west. Traditionally teachers dealt with a *paṭalam* or *carukkam*

of a long epic poem and were not called upon, as part of the pedagogic exercise, to look at the work as a whole. It must be admitted, also, that there has been very little of the critical climate in the past as exists today and except tributes in verse form put in the highest hyperbole from one poet to another, there has been little attempt to assess a literary work on a critical basis. It is now urgently necessary to build up a critical apparatus with which to judge literary works; and the present writer feels that this school of Genre Criticism may furnish a tool or two in the fashioning of the apparatus.

Even though intended as a supplement to the series entitled 'A Descriptive Catalogue of Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Tamil', a chapter has been added on modern literature in which field no manuscripts are expected to be listed and described. The reason for this is that, though planned as a supplemental volume, this is also designed to serve the purpose of a complete guidebook on Tamil literary genres for the excellent reason that there is no such book in English available today. The genres in Tamil deserve to be studied as an important and interesting subject for their own sake and it is hoped that this will serve as an introduction to the keen-minded researcher, undertaking such a study.

The present writer would like to record his gratitude not only to the Director and other staff of the Institute of Asian Studies and Mr. C. Arunacalam and K. Murali, his assistants for the project but to Mr. P. Cuntaramurti, Mr. V. Aiyah and Mr. A. V. Rācakōpālaṉ who rendered invaluable help in getting ready the press copy, in making a number of suggestions for the improvement of the work and in the preparation of the annexures.

A. V. SUBRAMANIAN

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Vowels

அ - a	உ - u	ஐ - ai
ஆ - ā	ஊ - ū	ஒ - o
இ - i	எ - c	ஓ - ō
ஈ - ī	ஏ - ē	ஔ - au
	ஃ - k̲	

Consonants

க் - k	த் - t	ல் - l	ஜ் - j
ங் - ṅ	ந் - n	வ் - v	ஶ - ś
ச் - c	ப் - p	ழ் - ḻ	ஷ் - ṣ
ஞ் - ñ	ம் - m	ள் - ḷ	ஸ் - s
ட் - ṭ	ய் - y	ற் - r̲	ஹ் - h
ண் - ṇ	ர் - ṙ	ன் - n̲	க்ஷ் - kṣ

CONTENTS

Chapter One

INTRODUCTORY

When man first began to use language for recording his feelings in a manner in which the recording would give pleasure to those who heard it, his utterance which can be counted as incipient literature was necessarily short. The short ode or lay or lyric is so universally the first poetic utterance of man in all languages everywhere. These early poets could not have arrived at this short form as a result of long cogitation; none of them could have separately identified the form of the utterance from its contents and elected the short form of the ode or the lyric as the medium of their composition for its superior merits. It just did not occur to them to present their feelings in any other form. Their individual, isolated experiences simply did not require a bigger form to accommodate them. The complex structure and the great length of the epic were developed when the need arose and the need did not arise till very much later.

The earliest literary sallies of the human mind, as preserved for posterity, were love lyrics, prayers to the gods and panegyrics on heroes and kings. We also see, now and then, doleful dirges on calamities, personal as well as those that befell cities and societies. They were based on a single emotion as the core of an experience and hence, needed a few lines to present it in; and in the absence of facilities for writing them down, they had necessarily to be short, of a size that could be committed to memory with ease.

Let us savour some selected samples of these earliest poetic ventures known to man. Sumeria is credited with one of the earliest civilizations, one in which art and poetry flourished; if the art of writing is regarded as one of the signs of civilization, then Sumeria which in-

vented the clay tablet and the cuneiform style of writing must surely be recognised as the earliest of civilized societies. Here is a prayer addressed by Gudea, king of Lagash, one of the Sumerian states, who ruled around 2600 B.C.; the prayer is addressed to the goddess Bau, the patron deity of the state:

O, my Queen, the mother who established Lagash,
The people on whom thou lookest is rich in power;
The worshipper on whom thou lookest, his life is prolonged.
I have no mother - thou art my mother;
I have no father - thou art my father. . .
My goddess Bau, thou knowest what is good;
Thou hast given me the breath of life.
Under the protection of thee, my mother,
In thy shadow I will reverently dwell. (1)

The sack of Ur, the premier Sumerian state by Elam provoked many melancholy dirges from poets who perceptively realised that one epoch was clearly ended and all they had held dear was suddenly destroyed, never to rise again.

The Sumerians developed the makings of an epic quite early in the course of their evolution by singing the exploits of their legendary hero, Gilgamesh, in short pieces, with obviously no idea they would be compiled into an epic much later. Scholars feel that the epic reached its present form only in the heyday of Babylon though it should have been based on fragments of the heroic deeds of Gilgamesh, composed as separate pieces by Sumerian minstrels. A parallel to this is found among the early Greeks whose minstrels had composed stirring tales of heroic deeds performed by Achilles and Ulysses which were later collected together under the two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

We next consider the Babylonian civilization though there are others chronologically prior to it, for the reason that it derived many

cultural elements from the Sumerian, like fragments of the exploits of Gilgamesh. They added some of their own to these and built up the Epic, not in accord with a predetermined plan. Gilgamesh, of whom they said with love and reverence

Two thirds of him is god
One third of him is man (2)
and again
He peered through all secrets
Through wisdom's mantle that veileth all (3)

was a durable epic hero of the entire Mesopotamia. His story has a rare verve and tempo of movement, spiced by many myths and legends of which the most significant is the story of the Flood.

Apart from these epic fragments, the poets of Babylon sang hymns and prayers to their many gods, chiefly to Marduk, the priormost of them. And as in Sumeria, in Babylon too there were crowned heads among the poets. Nebuchadnezzar, the fiery warrior-king could go down to the nadir of self-abasement in his prayer to Marduk, asking rhetorically,

Without thee, Lord, what could there be
For the king thou lovest, and dost call his name? (4)

A large number of short songs came to be composed during the hey-day of Babylon full of confessions ("my sins are seven times seven") and oozing with penitence; they were intensely used by the priests in their interminable rituals, during the long and solemn processions when the icons of their gods were carried reverently through the city streets.

From Babylon to Egypt is only a short leap. The Egyptian civilization is one of the oldest in the world; what is called the Old Kingdom dates back to 3600 B.C.. Unfortunately the literature of the earliest days has been mostly lost to us; the fragments that remain are not of high quality. Perhaps chance, in its caprice, had destroyed all the most

worthy works, allowing only the less inspired writings to survive. We have the pyramid texts, about 5000 years old today, pious hymns engraved on the walls in five pyramids; they are only of religious and not of any literary value. An interesting class of literature of about 2000 B.C. is in prose and an autobiography-a genre extremely rare to find in the ancient world. This work is an account of the travels of an ancient mariner, rather like Sinbad. There is another, the autobiography of a public official who flees Egypt at the death of his patron king, wanders through all the known world and despite noticeable success there returns home drawn by a love of his homeland. The story ends with the new Pharaoh forgiving him his fleeing and treating him with courtesy.

As the Indians, so are the Egyptians, with a long hoary civilization, expert at story-telling. Old Egyptian literature is full of short tales of ghosts and spirits, fables that anticipate the Pañcatantra and Aesop and romances of princes and princesses with an Egyptian version of the Cinderella Story.

In poetry, after the hymns of the Pyramid texts we see the gradual emergence of a secular literature dominated, as everywhere, by the deathless theme of love. A lover who has been "made merry without beer" when he kisses her, longs wistfully for a position, a station in life he is not to get, for he says

Would that I were her Negress slave who is in attendance on her,
So should I behold the hue of all her limbs. (5)

A woman could air her love as well as a man; here is a lady love mouthing her sentiment with a good bit of imagery:

Thou art to me as the garden
Which I have planted with flowers
And all sweet-smelling herbs (6)

But love is not the only theme, though, certainly it dominates. We have short pieces on war, pious hymnal songs, stirring poems of

valour, romantic short novels, ethical exhortations and fragments dealing with law, historical narrative and philosophical disquisitions. What is not found here is epic and drama.

In China, poets had been composing short poems called odes from the Shang dynasty which ruled China from 1700 B.C. Most of them have been lost but a few remain thanks to the fact that they found a place in the collection of "Shi-Ching" or "Book of Odes" compiled by that Titan of ancient China, Confucius. The Book contains short poems of great suggestivity on varied themes like religion, war, and love. There is an ode of lament by soldiers who have had to leave their homes and loved ones so that they may fight in a battle for the king and die. Here is a glimpse from a poem, clearly reflecting the sentiment of a love-lorn lady awaiting the coming of her lover:

The morning glory climbs above my head,
Pale flowers of white and purple, blue and red.
I am disquieted.
Down in the withered grasses something stirred;
I thought it was his footfall I heard.
Then a grasshopper chissed.
I climbed the hill just as the new moon showed,
I saw him coming on the southern road,
My heart lays down its load. (7)

The literature of China is completely dominated by short poems which are a model of brevity with delicacy of touch and an infinite suggestivity as their main qualities. This class of poetry came to its zenith in the 8th century A.D. under the Tang emperors and the chief exponents were Li Po and Tu Fu, both acknowledged masters of the short verse. Their poetry forms part of the educational curriculum of every Chinese child today and this study is probably responsible for making the average Chinese an artist and a philosopher.

Let us take a quick look at ancient Greece before we return to India to study its oldest literature. We know and admire the earlier Cretan civilization but no part of its literature has come down to us. The Greeks were as fond of song and dance as any other community but to these in their case was added the gift of innovative versification. They sang of love and war, the two staple themes of all poets all over the world. Wandering minstrels entertained the great of the land with songs of the valorous exploits of the heroes of the past. As these songs mainly centered on the events of the great siege of Troy these fragments were stitched together, in course of time by the brighter bards into epic lengths. Thus was the Iliad born. From the great differences noticed in the style and dialect used and from the many errors and repetitions which called forth the comment "Homer nods" scholars conclude that the Iliad must have been built up from a large number of small pieces sung by different poet-minstrels over a wide range of time.

It is possible that the Odyssey, too, originated as small poetic fragments on the great Greek hero Odysseus. But this epic displays greater homogeneity of style and characterization and is gentle in tone as contrasted with the blood and iron of the Iliad. It is possible that a gifted poet-it could be Homer, of coming later than the poets of the Iliad took up some existing poetic fragments and not only stitched them up but himself composed the major part of the epic , homogeneizing the rest. It is clear beyond doubt that literature arose in Greece, in the shape of short poems of the bardic variety. That they were pieced together into two great epics was in accord with a later literary vogue, in the same pattern in which the epic of Gilgamesh was stitched together in Mesopotamia.

We can now take a good look at India of the Vedic period. Scholars are not certain when the first of the Vedas, the Rig Veda came to be composed. But from all the evidence available, it is difficult to place it later than 2000 B.C.; This would provide the minimum time intervals for the appearance of the other Vedas and then of the Upanishads and

of the protestant faiths, Buddhism and Jainism, bearing in mind the difficulties of communication and transport in those days.

The Rig Veda poets sang on the gods and the fire ritual performed to propitiate them. The poems on the Dawn revered as a goddess are some of the most poetic in the entire literature. Verses on Indra are vigorous and occasionally rise to poetic heights. Hymns on Varuna are full of penitence for the sins committed and are often sublime in tone. Besides these hymns there are a few poems on purely worldly themes including a remarkable piece on gambling. Let us savour a few of them in excerpts translated by the present author.

The first sample is a hymn on Indra by Visvamitra, one of the most poetically gifted of the Vedic rishis:

Bounteous giver, do not melt away!
Stand, O Indra, receive the soma
Well-pressed and offered with my melodious song
I grasp at the hem of your splendid garment
Anxious and eager, like a child, its father's. (8)

The Sun as the sustainer of all life receives several fine hymns; here he is called Savita, the nourisher and praised with considerable metaphor and rich imagery:

Let Savita the Lord of universal bliss
Turn in our direction, even as the cows
At the end of the day speed to their village,
As warriors turn to their battle horses
As milch cows turn in flowing love
Towards their calves expectant, eager.
May the upholder of the firmament
Turn towards us like a man to his beloved. (9)

Here is another hymn to the same resplendent god:

The Sun has risen, the splendid symbol glowing
Of all gods, the eye of Mitra, Varuna,
The eye of the fire-god; the soul of all that moves

The soul of things that do not stir has risen
Pervading the earth and heaven and all
That stands between. (10)

As a sample of the many highly poetical hymns composed on Dawn, the following piece is given; in the Rig Vēdic days, the Sun is the lover of Dawn, the youthful goddess.

Like a maiden, proud
Of her effulgent beauty.
You go, goddess
Of resplendent Dawn
Speeding to meet
The god awaiting
With eager longing.
And youthful maiden,
Smiling, shining,
In your eager ardour,
You uncover your bosom
Before your lover! (11)

Having described her rendezvous with her lover, the Vēdic poet prays to her to accept him as her son.

Sarasvati which was the name of a river in Punjab during Vedic days was worshipped as the stimulator of men's minds. In the post-Vedic era, she is universally regarded as the Goddess of Learning:

Mighty ocean
Of the brightest light,
Sarasvati
Illumines all.
She makes men's minds
Bright, effulgent! (12)

Apart from the descriptive and the lyrical, we have speculative hymns whose spirit of honest enquiry inspired the Upanishadic sages. The most famous of all of them is the Hymn of Creation from which a

stanza is reproduced:

Who knows in truth, who, among us, can
Declare from where it came, this world of ours?
Whence came these creatures, what th'ultimate source
Of all this teeming world? In truth its not
The Devas: later was their birth, later
Than Creation. Who then knows the answers,
When and whence has all this risen, who identifies
The Progenitor of all created things? (13)

It is admitted by many scholars that the Rig Veda constitutes the oldest poetry of the Indo-Europeans. And this oldest poetry was all short poem. The Rig Veda has a thousand sūktas which are the units of which the whole book is built up. Most sūktas have ten or eleven stanzas each; the longest of them has only 51 stanzas and this size is quite the exception in the work. Hence it is safe to say that the oldest Aryan poets expressed themselves in short poems, whatever the theme they chose. The stanza itself consisted of four feet in the majority of the metres while the famous Gayatri has only three short feet. Metres with more than four feet are not commonly seen. Thus the medium of poetic expression of the oldest Indo-European race was the short poem of about 40 lines.

We have taken up for this analysis only literary communities which can lay claim to being very old and which developed literary modes of expression more or less on their own. It is true the Babylonians and the Assyrians flourished roughly in the same geographical area as the older Sumērian society and they were definitely influenced by the Sumērians. Still the Babylonians were considered in the analysis on account of the vigorous innovative energies which attended their literary advent; an important reason of course, is that even the Babylonians represent quite an old civilization which reached its zenith 2000 years before Christ. In studying the rise of literary forms naturally the oldest societies have to be taken into account -societies not unduly influenced by others who came earlier.

For that reason, we are not studying the European societies all of which modelled their literature on the Greek epics. For the same reason the literature of the other areas in India will not be considered in this analysis. The oldest of these literatures was not born till 1000 A. D. by which time the literature of Sanskrit had spread throughout the land and Sanskrit modes and forms had taken a stranglehold on the creative writers everywhere, inclusive of the Tamil land. For the purpose of this study, therefore, only the Vedic and the Tamil society are being considered; even though the oldest extant Tamil poetry is later chronologically to the Vēdic, it was a wholly original product not influenced by Sanskrit modes. It would be amply evident from the discussion of the Tamil *Caṅkam* literature which follows, that the literary effort in Tamil had a uniquely original birth and development, owing nothing to other societies.

Chapter Two

CAṄKAM LITERATURE

Certain outstanding characteristics

After sustaining inestimable loss of works owing to natural cataclysms and man's neglect, the Tamils have still got a hoary old grammar which includes a section on Poetics and three libraries of literary works, all in poetic form. There are scholars who claim, on the basis of a later-day commentary to a work on poetics, that there were a large number of literary works and works of grammar too composed over a very long period extending to thousands of years before Christ. As none of them is available today, it is difficult to place reliance on a single version as referred to and accept the position that all these varied works did, in fact, exist. It is more realistic to confine our attention to what we have before us as works provenly of the *Caṅkam* epoch which can be ascribed to the period of 500 years from 200 B.C. to 300 A.D.

The grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam* which has survived these cataclysms and neglect is rated as older than these literary works. This view is not uniformly held by all the scholars and there is a school which would bring it down to after 500 A.D. But as the preponderant evidence points to a much earlier age, we shall tentatively accept a date prior to 200 B.C. for this grammar. While a strong sense of realism prompts us to reject the idea of a large number of works of earlier dates existing, it cannot be denied that the Poetics portion of the *Tolkāppiyam* appears like a work composed on the basis of rich literary conventions evolved over a considerable length of time. Indeed, there are references in the work like "So opine the scholars," and "It has been stated" which point clearly to works on the subject and schools of thought existing before the time of the *Tolkāppiyam*. It is possible that the very excellence of the *Tolkāppiyam* rendered it unnecessary for scribes to copy the earlier texts and the students to study them. The

same phenomenon has been noticed in the case of Sanskrit; Pāṇini, the grammarian and Yaska, the etymologist refer to many writers going before them; but none of the works of these writers has come down to us, most probably because the high quality of the works of Pāṇini and Yaska rendered the earlier ones redundant.

While the earliest literature of all the old civilizations we have studied is either wholly or predominantly religious, the earliest creative work of the Tamils is almost wholly secular. This is a vital argument going to prove the wholly indigenous nature of the earliest Tamil literary works. During this highly creative epoch called the *Caṅkam*, the Tamils evolved a wholly native set of literary conventions and a literary framework based on innovated theories of literature. These *Caṅkam* Tamils were religious, certainly; and references to gods and the different methods of worshipping them are strewn about in their works. But there is no hymn, no prayer addressed to any of the gods. The one work related to the peculiarly Tamil deity Murukaṉ is cast in a literary mould and the atmosphere is wholly poetical, not religious. Their literary conventions and their framework for creative literary work were so original and unique that their likeness can be seen nowhere among other civilized societies. Indeed this unique set-up vanished even from the land of its birth, swept away in the flood of literary mores from the north. The *Caṅkam* literary mores are therefore a precious museum piece, rather like Ming pottery and the silk of old Murshidabad, wonderfully delicate, beautiful beyond words and out of production today.

The most characteristic feature of *Caṅkam* literature is the division of the entire field into two blocks, the *Akam* and the *Puṟam* and the large body of conventions attached to each of them. This basic division and the conventions attached appear in their fullest maturity in the *Tolkāppiyam* itself and is observed meticulously in the literary works of the period. This would indicate that the Tamils had developed these conventions over a period of time, probably for hundreds of years before the advent of Christ and composed poems which have been lost to

us. As grammar always follows in the wake of creative literature and never precedes it, this conjecture is not wholly chimerical. But, leaving this world of conjecture behind, it would be necessary in furtherance of our object here, (and the present writer hopes, it would turn out to be an agreeable exercise, too) to devote a certain amount of time to a study of this basic division and the conventions that attach to it.

Tolkāppiyar makes a classification of fundamental importance dividing all poetry into *Akam* and *Puṟam*. The clear-cut and exclusive division is *Akam* while *Puṟam* includes all that will not fall under *Akam*. So the concept of *Akam* becomes very important and its subtle implications should be clearly understood. It can be understood to include all love poems which obey certain laws meticulously. One of the laws is that the poet should speak of love that is fulfilled or is certain to be fulfilled. Another is that it should be mutual. A third law, very rigorously enforced is that no names or other details which may help to identify the characters should be mentioned in the poem. These regulations will be discussed in some detail later on. *Puṟam*, which includes all the other types of poems is dominated by the motifs of war and philanthropy; love poems with a tragic sequel or where names are mentioned are consigned to *Puṟam*.

Tolkāppiyar divides the elements which go to make an *Akam* poem into three main groups. The first is the type of land in which the love-episode happens and the ideal time for it: the time being again divided into the season of the year and the part of the day. The second main grouping includes all the characteristics of the land like the flora and the fauna, the nature of human habitations in the area, the pursuits of the people and their pastimes, even the special gods they worship; the grammarians count as many as fourteen characteristics as falling under this grouping. The third, the heart of the poem, is its ruling sentiment or mood. And clearly the first two groups are intended to subserve the third and are justified and sustained only in so far as they enhance its impact.

For the wooded slopes, the season of the year nominated is the rainy winter and the time is mid-night. The characteristic fauna of the land usually met with in poems treating of this division of land are the bear, the tiger, the elephant and the monkey: among the flora we get recurrent mention of the *kuṟinci*, the *vēṅkai* and the sandal tree, the pepper creeper and the bamboo copse. The people of the land follow hunting as an important pursuit but also grow mountain millet on the slopes and get inebriated on mead cured in sections of bamboo. The god presiding over the hills is Murukaṉ whose brave exploits are balladized by the hunters' wives. The prevailing emotion is the fierce love of young people on which an edge has been set by the need for secrecy. For premarital love is as pure and blemishless as it is tempestuous, all-consuming. The young people know that it is not licentious profligacy, that they will love nobody else in this or their succeeding lives till the end of time. But the parents of the girl are apt to take a dim view of the whole affair and the lovers have therefore to meet in a most clandestine manner and at other times try to conceal the physical and mental marks of their deep involvement. Tempestuous love with overtones of fear is the emotional core of this group of lyrics.

The wooded meadows offering ideal grazing conditions are the next important division of land for which the season chosen is the onset of the rainy season and the ideal time is the evening. The animals that characterise the region are the deer and the rabbits and the *mullai* creeper is its significant plant. The people tend sheep and goats and cows and milk products are their common food; they worship Tirumāl. The prevailing mood in this land is one of expectation; the lovers are separated but the lover is expected back with the first rains and there is hope in the air though the separation is painful to bear.

In a similar way the morning is the ideal time of the riverine plains and the noon, that of the deserts. While the former offer ideal conditions for growing grains, the people in the deserts have no other occupation but to plunder and kill the hapless way-farer. The prevailing

sentiment of the plains has been ideally chosen: married life gets a little stale for the man who naturally seeks extra-marital adventures. The poems composed on this land division treat of the travails of the wronged wife and the return of the repentant husband who gets chastised at her hands. It is always the man that goes astray, never the woman: woman has been idealised in *Caṅkam* lyrics. In the poems set in the background of the pitiless deserts, the pangs of separation between loving couples are accented.

In the fifth division of land in the sea shore, the prevailing sentiment is love-in-separation again: perhaps the difference between this and that associated with the deserts is one of degree, the latter having overtones of near-despair.

The value of the conventions

That these conventions are not arbitrary will be obvious to the discerning reader. Secret love has to progress in the shady glades of mountain slopes preferably under cover of darkness. The rain and the terrors of the mountain path taking the lover to the trysting place all accentuate the awful sweetness of clandestine love. A powerful urge to the progress of their love is the fear of discovery by the hunters of the girl's clan whose tempers are as quick as the arrows they shoot.

In the meadows the season is very appropriately the on-set of the first rains. Men had to go away to far-off places either to earn money or as members of an expeditionary force. But all activity ceases with the first rains and the lover is expected back at home at the conclusion of his labours. The evening in the cattle country is redolent with the suggestion of reunion: the cowherds lead back the cattle to the village where lovers are brought together and cattle are joined by their eager calves.

In the well-watered plains where food grows easily, the leisure and the life of ease lead men's minds naturally to vice: hence the land is

peopled with erring husbands and doleful wives. The deserts are an appropriate setting for poems that treat of anguished hearts. The girl's mind is tormented by the mental pictures of waterless desert tracks her man has to traverse where life shrivels away in the pitiless heat of the noon-day sun and gangs of dacoits murder and loot the way-farer. The shore of the restless sea is a natural setting for anguished expectation of a girl in love for her man who has crossed the seas in the pursuit of trade. It should be remembered that the ancient Tamils were a sea-faring people and frequent references to maritime trade are met with in the oldest Tamil books.

The course of true love seldom runs smooth: the lovers in *Caṅkam* poetry as elsewhere suffer a great deal of travail. J.M. Murray rightly observes in his Discoveries, "Love poets are but seldom the singers of happiness in love." Except in the poems with the riverine plains as back-ground, separation between the lovers is the basic theme and the emotion treated is wistful sadness. (In the poems on married love, the couple gets estranged and the wife awaits the return of the philanderer in sorrow and in anger.) In the poems on premarital love, in addition to their being unable to meet as often as their hearts prompted them, the lovers undergo a great deal of painful anxiety, wondering when their elders will discover the goings-on; and on discovery, refuse to bless their wedding. In the poems with the sea-shore and the desert as backgrounds too, separation is the motif and sorrowful longing the prevailing mood. Indeed in the desert group of poems the fountain of hope runs almost dry. Separation clearly has more poetic potential than requital.

Three vital prohibitions

Sorrow is the very stuff of which *Caṅkam* love poems are made. But it is the sorrow of the immediate present, it is never despair; there is always a subtle note of hope running like a golden thread through all

Cańkam love poetry. Convention sternly forbids poets singing of hopeless or one sided love. Such unrequited love and love involving totally inappropriate age-difference or social levels which consequently is unlikely to be fulfilled cannot, by a specific prohibition, be made the subject matter of love poetry. *Cańkam* poets display considerable skill in portraying pangs of anguish with a distinct suggestion of wedding bells in the not distant future. They perform the slickest type of tight-rope-walking with easy pose; with commendable poetic restraint they avoid the extremes of superficial and ineffective treatment of sorrow on the one hand and bleak despair on the other.

One reason why the reader is not misled into supposing that the girl's love will go unrequited, that the girl herself may be overtaken by a tragic fate is that the words of despair are put in her mouth and are therefore not taken by the reader at their face value. A significant and wholly characteristic feature of *Cańkam* love poetry is that every one of the poems is put in the direct speech, being the expression of the thought and emotions of one of the characters involved. In none of them does the poet intrude recording his own views. This is an invariable convention and has high literary value: this merits detailed consideration and will be discussed elsewhere in the book.

Another invariable convention in *Cańkam* love poetry is that the characters should not be named; in fact there is an inflexible ban against any kind of identifiable description pointing to a known contemporary or a historical personage. This ban is so absolute that this provides the one criterion which divides *Cańkam* poetry into two clearly marked groups. Even poems treating of love between man and woman are classified as "*Puṟam*" and not as "*akam*" if there is so much as a hint that may possibly lead to the identification of the boy or the girl involved. A modern reader may feel that this rule is too tyrannical and even unliterary but the *Cańkam* poets have scrupulously conformed to it in the eight anthologies which form the heart of *Cańkam* literature. Every era has to be judged by the norms of that era and from the

viewpoint of the *Caṅkam* poets this rule was of the essence, one that could not lightly be transgressed. This cardinal convention and its impact will be discussed at some length later on in the book. But one aspect of this most sensible convention will be immediately apparent. If all the poems of love have been recorded as the versions of one or other of the characters, it would be most unnatural to expect the names of the lovers to be bandied about: in the informality of direct speech in daily life, where heart speaks to heart only personal pronouns are used and seldom the names.

We referred to three libraries constituting the *Caṅkam* literature. The first and the priormost in terms of quality is the set of eight anthologies, some given to *Akam* and some to *Puṟam*. The next is a library of ten long poems, long in the eyes of the *Caṅkam* poet and dilettante, the longest being only of 782 lines. The third, coming distinctly later from the point of time, is a collection of 18 works among which those devoted to moral teaching predominate and six only are on the subject of *Akam*. The celebrated *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is a member of this collection.

All the poems belonging to the first library are short; indeed they range from as short a size as 5 lines to a maximum of 140 lines and smaller poems are overwhelmingly predominant. One of these anthologies is entirely built up of very short poems ranging in length from 4 to 8 lines. This anthology, the *Kuṟuntokai* is so universally held as the greatest of the *Caṅkam* works that it can be stated with confidence that if all the other works of the era had been lost (as indeed they were still the labours of the savant Dr. Iyer retrieved them to a grateful public), the impact of *Caṅkam* literature would not be significantly less. Another work, the *Naṟṟiṇai* carries the limits upwards from 9 to 12 lines and the *Akanāṉūṟu* contains poems longer than 12 lines. Even though the upper limit of poems in the last-mentioned work has not been fixed, most of the pieces are less than 20 lines and the longest only of 31 lines.

The ten long poems, as has been stated are quite short by later day

standards, the shortest being of 103 lines and the longest, as stated earlier, of 782 lines. The eighteen works encompass separate stanzas, self-contained and self-sufficient, though they may be classified under decads or sections of varying length, as the case may be. Hence, overall we are dealing with a literature of short poems, short by international standards (in comparison with the literatures of other early civilizations). And the collection of the shortest poems has attained the highest literary excellence among them all.

What is the secret of the success of these extraordinarily short poems that have managed to survive two thousand years of cataclysms, changes of governments, changes of a radical nature in society, in literary fashions, in ways of life? The answer in brief would be the towering merit of the *Cańkam* poets themselves, helped considerably by the most unusual literary conventions which they observed with scrupulous care. As the conventions have been outlined briefly earlier, we can do no better to illustrate our point than quote a few of the poems (in translation) and examine them from the viewpoint of how excellence has been secured despite the size.

An example studied

First let us study a poem of the mountains where the prevailing mode is premarital love. As it is an extremely short poem of only four lines, there is no room for a detailed description of the place and the characters involved; there is no time to evoke the sentiment through a description of the atmosphere. Let us now examine the poem and see how the trick is done.

The friend of the girl speaks

Lord of the hills, where after the rains
Of the previous night have ceased to be
The waterfalls resound to the heavens,
Even after your meetings cease

Our love for you cannot wear away
It cannot languish, it cannot die. (1)

(*Kuruntokai 42*)

The dilettante who savours the poem is expected to know all the conventions. He knows, the moment the hills are mentioned and waterfalls and rains and night time, that the episode that is to be presented is centered round a case of premarital love. Mountain slopes and things like waterfalls get naturally associated with premarital love and secret meetings and heartaches occasioned by the failure of the young man to turn up for the rendezvous. This natural association in the mind of the reader is taken advantage of and a whole lot of space is saved by way of descriptions. Night is the time prescribed by convention for these clandestine meetings and the reference to the previous night in connection with the rain is expected to evoke the mood of premarital love in the mind of the reader. The conventions not only render long and tiresome descriptions unnecessary thus saving time and preventing fatigue; they suggest, in a subtle manner, the atmosphere and the background of the emotional play, rather than state things blatantly; and suggestion is a powerful literary device in evoking sentiment.

It may be observed that all these valuable suggestions are not made in what can be called the operative part of the message; they occur as part of the phrase "Lord of the hills" used to address the young man; and they contain a hidden analogy. The rains have ceased to be- they stopped sometime the previous night-but the waterfalls are still to be seen white against the blue-black of the slopes. The hero has stopped coming to the tryst and their union is discontinued. But, the friend of the girl points out sharply with a touch of asperity, her love for him continuous unabated, like the waterfalls. It is a pure and elevated love that does not subsist on physical things. He may have stopped coming, out of indifference, his ardour may be cooling off, but not the girl's; once her love has been given to another, it stands given, it does

not diminish, it does not expect to be nourished by constant meetings.

So much has been suggested by a four line poem with the aid of a most unique set of conventions not met with in any other literary-minded society. A long poem of fifty lines where everything relating to the atmosphere and the mood is blandly stated and described will not have this effect at all on the reader. And remember, every stanza on premarital love will need such a tiresome description, if there had been no such conventions. These short poems of *Caṅkam* each constitutes a complete and self-sufficient unit dealing with a rounded, meaningful experience that delights the reader through subtle suggestion.

More examples of pithy short poems

Let us now study a poem (of five lines) that is set in the grassy meadows. As was stated earlier, the meadows are the proper, natural setting for the mood of expectancy. The lover has to leave the girl on temporary absence in order to earn the wherewithal to run the household when they get married-or it may be on a king's errand or as a member of an expeditionary force marching on a neighbouring country. As all business comes to a standstill in the rainy season, he promised to his ladylove that he would return to her, before the first rains came down.

The affairs of men tend to get prolonged and the lover is unable to return as promised. The first rains have come down and the *mullai* creeper has started putting up buds. The lady-love gets restless feeling let down. But her friend tries to console her with a well-intentioned lie that the rains had not started. She knows the girl has not left the house and she thinks the onset of the rains may not have been noticed by her. But the girl has seen a tell-tale evidence and would not be comforted. Let us listen to her own sad version: -

The girl speaks

He isn't here and the mullai blooms!

When the shepherds wielding the hook'd stick
Came home driving their sheep in the gloaming,
A shepherd boy with a pail of milk
Came to our house not long ago
To barter milk for a measure of grain.
I saw him wearing buds of the mullai
On the hair of his head - tiny things
Still green in their casing, yet to open!
I saw them dear, the mullai buds-
I saw them on the hair of the shepherd boy! (2)

(Kuruntokai - 221)

Here the mood of separation is suggested by the references to the *mullai,* the sheep and milk which all conjure up an image of a meadow in the reader's mind. In this division of love poetry, the feeling of sorrow is somewhat muted, unlike in the desert division (the *pālai*) where it is acute; hence the poem serves up a certain unease, a tinge of disappointment in the girl's mind, no more. There is admirable restraint in *Caṅkam* poetry, a sign of great creative literature, abjuring inartistic excess of sentiment.

In the poems on the riverine plains, the husband is shown as swerving from the narrow path of virtue. He has little work to do as the land yields abundant crops with the least effort on the part of man; his long hours of leisure set up a need for excitement and he starts visiting prostitutes. But the *Caṅkam* poet is interested in how the wife reacts to his act of faithlessness.

There is a delicious poem of only five lines where the wronged wife visits on her husband the most effective punishment possible. She does not quarrel, she desists from tearful rebukes, when the husband returns to her from the homes of fallen women. In fact she goes about in a normal manner, without hinting by word or gesture at his misdemeanour, never for a moment showing a trace of resentment. The man is totally non-plussed at her unaccountable attitude: he is most sheep-

her bed all the long night through. The lady's grief is not utterly hopeless, of course: for such an one-sided love cannot figure in *Caṅkam* love literature, being sternly forbidden by convention. But the grief is sharper and the waiting more prolonged than in the poems with a pastoral setting: the difference is one of degree.

There is a delightful poem which fairly gives off the odour of drying fish; in reality it does much more than that, it presents the poor fisher-folk as people of dignity and self-respect. A boy deeply in love with a fisher-folk girl had stopped visiting her for sometime for some good reasons, not explained. When he arrives at the copse of trees in the beach, the sharptongued friend of the girl meets him.

The boy's parents are probably better-off than hers; the friend accuses him of churlish superciliousness arising out of his better station in life; she uses sarcasm to advantage. She says, "This girl belongs to humble fishermen-stock: you are the favourite son of a very prominent citizen of an ancient town. We engage ourselves in driving away the birds that come to steal the cut pieces of shark spread out to dry. We stink of the flesh of drying sea-food we handle all the time. You doubtless find the stench overpowering and avoid our company. We eke out a bare subsistence ploughing the expanse of the sea even as a farmer ploughs his fields. We may be your inferiors in the count of worldly goods - but perhaps in nobility of mien and a rugged independence we may well presume we are your equals!"

She is the daughter of simple fisher-folk
Who eke out a living by churning the mighty sea
To spear the fish, while you are the high-born son
Of a wealthy house in the ancient town, festooned
With flags that flutter from lofty masts in the wind!
What lasting joy, what profit can your love
Bring to us the humble girls engaged
In driving off the pirate flocks of gulls -

Thieving birds that hover over pieces
Of seafish spread on the sands of the beach to dry?
In truth we stink of drying fish, O Chieftain:
Pray stand afar if you must needs converse!
Our simple life of fisherfolk who plough
The briny field to gather in a fish harvest
Is on a footing different far from yours
In worldly goods; but we are not a feckless folk;
We may be poor but we are proud, we live
Fulfilling lives rich in the values held. (4)

[Naṟṟiṇai 45]

A single pointed emotion, an intense, short-lived mood of wistfulness is adequate in the hands of a dexterous poet to spin an immortal little poem. Here is a piece depicting such concentrated desolation of heart which possesses the boy and the girl and which will be swept away leaving not a wrack behind, the moment they are able to come together. The first is the version of the boy, telling himself:

Before I met the fisherfolk girl, before
Her doe-like eyes began to shackle me
How sweet to me was the sandy beach hard by,
The shadow dense of the puṉṉai tree from where
The girls of the village mounted careful guard
Over the fish that look like the tender root
Of turmeric spread on the sands to dry-
How nice the shore, how friendly looked the village
Of fishing folk, how sweet to me were these
In those happy days before I met her-
The girl with narrow hip and lovely eyes-
How sweet, surpassing sweet was everything! (5)

We can now see the girl's version, subtly, characteristically different from the boy's, the girl ruefully addressing her faithful friend:

Before I knew him, lost my heart to him,
This beach that's dense with ñāḻal trees was dear.
I used to love this and the scenes I witnessed here,
Like the gull that pounces on the dainty red fish swimming
In the limpid creek and spears the one that forms
A tasty morsel to tempt its mate with. Dearest mine,
I loved it then but today to me it fosters
Anguish and a loneliness; for he 'hasn't come to me
Back from his journey in time as sworn to me,
The Chieftain, dear, of the busy harbour where on the sands
Scattered lies the marchandise, from far away
Carried over the billowy sea in sailing ships,
Where the pregnant white crane perched on the punnai
 branch
Lies in fear of the roar of the restless waves.
In the happy days before I saw the Chieftain
In the days gone by, how dear to me was the beach!

(6)

[Naṟṟiṇai 31]

There is yet another aspect involving a different emotion set in the same background of a seashore village. The basic situation is very akin to what happens in *kuṟiñci*, the mood of the mountain slopes where premarital love prospers. The lovers imagine as they do all over the world that no one but they know about the goings-on. But the nosy village gossips come to know and soon the juicy news starts going the rounds of the village. She talks with imperious scorn of the gossip-mongers delineating them in one of the most vivid word-portraits literature has to offer:

The women of the town in groups gathered
Talk in voices hushed
With forefinger on the top of the nose
Conspiratorially,

Directing at me from the corner of their eyes
Derisive looks of scorn
In the open streets to spread low scandal
Touching me and him!
Mother drinks up everything
These gossips have to say
And armed with a rod, she spends her time
Castigating me!
Let me, dear, go with the chief
Of big, robust shoulders
Who comes to us at dead of night
Riding his chariot.
Drawn by horses, fleet of foot
With ruddy manes perfumed
By brushing against those twigs of flowers
That, everywhere are blooming!
We are eloping: and let this town
Entertain itself
With the dirty scandals it' s fond of spreading;
I care nothing for them! (7)

(*Narrinai* 149)

The poems depicting extreme anguish

Let us now savour a few short poems dealing with extreme anguish induced by long separation, depicted in the *pālaittiṇai*. (the division relating to the desert).

A young man had been once through the furnace: he had been bitten by the bug of love of money and had ventured out through desert walks and had come back with a little hoard. But they were young and perhaps a little heedless, a little improvident; the hoard soon melted away. Thoughts of a second journey flashed in his mind; the supply of cash was running low and he discovered himself nursing plans of going

out a second time. The poem shows him in a mood of bitter self-criticism. "Have I not suffered once-enough to last a life-time? Why repeat the experience, whatever the reward?" was the trend of his thinking.

One particular episode of his earlier journey appeared recurrently in his mind-not that anything sensational had happened by way of events but that it was memorable, it had become etched permanently in his heart on account of its personal emotional impact. He had been trudging his weary way across the remorseless desert all the afternoon. More than the physical factors of burning heat and a thirst that seemed unquenchable, he found the sights of the desert unpleasant in the extreme. There was a neem tree, huge and gaunt with spreading branches whose thin narrow leaves had mostly fallen, withered by the heat. On one of its top branches sat an eagle that had just laid a clutch of eggs and was still unwell and in pain. The nearly leafless tree gave a very indifferent shade where had gathered the unlettered urchins from the village of brigands. Perhaps these boys found even the sketchy shade of the tree a welcome change from their hot, inhospitable village huts. The ground was firm and hard, as if asphalted and though too arid for cultivation was most suited for a playground; having gathered the dried up fruits of the *nelli* tree, they were engaging in endless games where the fruit is thrown and gathered back.

Sights like these-the suffering eagle, the dried-up tree, the ground without a trace of moisture, the crude, unlettered boys, the pitiless men who can kill without flinching - depressed the way-farer so much, he began to curse the moment when he decided to venture out on this journey. "Just now, when the sun is setting amidst the western mountains, my wife would be lighting up the lamps and whispering to them in her overwhelming sorrow, 'He is away and the evening has come to torment me in my separations;' Why did I leave her and start on this journey-why indeed did I forsake her company?". This painful self-criticism made him utterly wretched for the rest of the tortuous

journey. The memory of this, it is presumed, quite effectively purged him of all desire to embark on a second journey.

My mind these days nags me on
To leave the house and sally forth
On a second journey to distant lands
That I may toil and garner wealth.
In my first venture into the burning desert
An eagle, pregnant and in the grip of pain
Was seen perched on the highest branch
Of a tree grown gaunt but leafless, bare
Casting a fitful spotted shade.
In the shade were boys from the hunters' homes
Playing with the dried up nelli fruits
Which they threw on the bone-dry ground
Stone-hard with the heat of a hundred summers.
The sun setting over the western mount.
In the gathering dusk where no lights
Redeemed the darkness, my mind went back
To evening scenes in my own house,
Where lighting the lamps, my wife sent up
Ardent prayers for my safe return.
The picture of my wife in my lustrous home
Symbolised the project's end,
The culmination success-crowned
Of all my toil, all my sweat. (8)

(*Narrinai 3*)

Another young man, not so considerate decides to leave for distant ands to acquire a little wealth; he tries to scotch any plans in his girl's nind of accompanying him in his journey by painting the horrors of the ntervening desert. Here is the spirited reply of the girl to the proposition:

You paint, my lover, the desert's terrors
In lurid colours; I too know
All the horrors that deserts harbour.
The wild cattle which feed on grass
Eat cacti for lack of aught else green.
The rains, which are scarce at the best of times
Often fail and the land takes on
The aspect of a fiery furnace.
The natives of this burning desert
With hearts as dry as the sands without
Shoot arrows at the hapless traveller,
Lured by hopes of gainful plunder;
Full well I know its rigours. But you,
You seem to know not how my heart
Would take the parting. Do not, dearest,
Wring my heart with pitiless words
Of leaving me when you sally forth
On your venture. If we go
You and I, attended by
The snags of the journey, that spells for me
Happiness. Come, we shall face
All the terrors of the journey together!
Separation is the only grief! (9)

(*Kalittokai-Pālai-6*)

The desert background is also utilised by the *Caṅkam* poets to tell the story of elopement when the boy and the girl decide that there is no likelihood of the parents of the girl agreeing to the proposal for a wedding. The desert mood is justified here only because the eloping lovers have to travel through the desert suffering much physical anguish, though they are naturally indifferent to it in their bubbling ecstasy. And the conditions attending their journey add to the inconsolable grief of the foster-mother of the girl who laments her going away

aving behind all those who love her so well. Here is a poem recording foster-mother's lament;

You full well know I' ve neither chick nor child but this
You know, too, she left the house, led on
In simple trust by the boy we know, the one who lives
Across the way, who wields a fearless javelin
In the field of battle. Even now they must be treading
The pathless tracts of burning rocky wasteland
And yet you say in all your wisdom ripe
'Stench your tears!' How stench my welling tears?
She's gone, my heart's delight: at every turn
I miss the child-the prettiest picture come to life!
How silent are the rooms that once echoed
To her playful prancing! Now I dread to walk them.
The house resounded in those happy bygone days
To peals of girlish laughter: now it' s sombre, still.
The frontal porch where through the afternoon
She churned up all her gusty games, the garden swing
She loved to ride-they mock my eager eyes
And turn to dust the yeasty hopes that sprout
In my aged breast. (10)

(*Narrinai 184*)

Let us now conclude this part of the passage in a happier mood by uoting the version of the young man addressing the girl to point out ne pleasant possibilities of their doubtless arduous journey.

Mine own, with teeth in a dazzling smile,
Do not let the hazards of the way
Or the rigours of the journey prey on your mind!
Just as eager pious men
At the end of noble, blameless deeds
Realise their god with their physical eyes,
I have got you after painful efforts,

I've got for myself your lovely person
To end my anguish! together, then,
We shall journey on our joyful way!
You can deck your handsome breast
With a paste of shoots and tiny flowers;
You can tarry as long as you like
Wherever we see a shady spot.
If you descry a sandy bank
You can build little homes of sand
In joyful sport! Let us wend our way
Through little towns that dot the plain,
Through shady orchards of mango trees
Where the cuckoo feeding on mango shoots
Regales the traveller with his dulcet notes. (11)

(*Naṟṟiṇai 9*)

The long Caṅkam poems

We can now take up what in *Caṅkam* arithmetic would be considered long poems. One sample is from *Kalittokai*, in a slightly longer metre, with 25 lines to it. With the wider scope allowed, the poet merely paints the picture in brighter colours, taking a little more time to portray the 'concealed' metaphor and using a few more words effectively to convey the anxiety of the girl and her friend. But the basic emotional experience that is transferred through the medium of the poem remains unitary and naturally delimited to a single glimpse of a mind in anguish.

Chief of hill slopes where, in the woods a tusker ranging wide
Met and battled a fiery tiger, overcame at the end
The powerful enemy and went to sleep in the grateful shade of a copse,

Fatigued by the fearsome fight: And dreamt a dream of battle
Fighting the self-same mighty cat, got up wild with rage,
Saw before it a vēṅkai tree in the season's fullest bloom,
Mistook the tree for the tiger-foe, fell on it with fury
And reduced it to a heap of faggots: but with its anger cooling
Realised its bloomer, felt the deepest shame at this
Impetuous act and thereafter could not look at what
Once was a tree that was full-grown, stately, now a useless ruin
Could not bear to see the tree reduced now to kindling
And hung down its head in bashfulness. Happy we are, chieftain
When we see how loving you are, how dear to you this girl
With eyes like flowers: but how disturbing the thought
Of the dangers of the mountain-path and the thunder and the rains
that beset you when journeying to keep the nightly tryst.
When we remember how much love you shower on this girl
We feel happy; but we get anxious, when we remember
The nameless terrors of the jungle path you traverse every night.
How fond you are of this comely girl with tresses glossy black!
It makes us happy to contemplate the depth of the love you bear
To the girl of your heart; but we are anguished when we ruminate
O'er how you walk the nightly path churned by elephant herds
How armed with a javelin you swagger on, heedless, unafraid
Of the loneliness. Please do not always come of nights to her!
You can meet her in daytime, too, in the rocky mountain slopes
Strewn with flowers: so come, my chieftain when the sun is shining too! (12)

(*Kalittokai- 13*)

The poet uses the larger canvas to present a gripping picture of an irate elephant locked in a terrific combat with a tiger to convey the girl's fear every night when her young man walks the mountain path to keep

his tryst with her, But, as pointed out, the experience transferred is homogeneous and the impact on the reader, a rounded, undistracted sentiment.

The poems in *Akanāṉūṟu* are reckoned long but they purvey the same kind of artistically delimited, unitary experience which we get from the five-line poems of the shorter work. One poem of 13 lines is reproduced here in translation for the reader's assessment and delectation.

The people of the village speak

Her daughter went with her youthful lover leaving home
andhearth, Through wild terrain where a cow-elephant had
fallen into a pit
And her stricken mate with lifted trunk was loudly trumpeting
While their calf with a rosy mouth scampered out to a clearing
And beseeching a mountain cow it sucked her callous milk.
She went her way but her playmates all in total anguish sunk
Are now in tears, a piteous lot! And her helpless doting mother
Descried her daughter's favorite doll now lying on the sands,
Picked it up and laid it in the shade of the nocci tree .
Tenderly she stroked the eyes and the forehead of the doll
And dressed its hair with the faded flowers from her daughter's
favourite plant
Crooning the while with a tender pathos, "You look so like her!
Will you not, my handsome child, bring her back to me?" (13)
(*Akanāṉūṟu* 165)

The later Caṅkam works

It was stated earlier that out of the library of 18 works of this era, as many as six are on the theme of *Akam*. Let us savour two pieces from these collections to see how the poets adroitly harness the conventions to get the maximum mileage out of their short poems. Both the poems quoted are of four lines, the last line being a little shorter than the rest.

The first is set in the background of mountain slopes and portrays the powerful emotional surges occasioned by premarital love. The young man prefers to prolong this period but the girl and, more vociferously, her friend want the tie to be formalised in a public wedding. The girl is naturally shy and tongue-tied but not so the strong-willed and sharp-tongued friend who thinks up various stratagems to urge the lover to arrange for their wedding. This is a situation very popular with *Caṅkam* lyricists who have combined to evoke a fine picture of the friend as a devoted sharp-shooter. Let us hear her:

Sensing the secret goings-on
Mother has banned our going out
Now, there is the risk of the mountain chieftain
Misreading our failure
To turn up at the tryst, as we've done -
The chief of the hills where the ape
On obtaining a ripe jack fruit
Calls his mate with endearments!
Will he not now misunderstand
And precipitate a tiff with you? (14)

(*Tiṇaimoḻi aimpatu* 10)

The references to the hills, the ape and the jackfruit all quickly evoke an expectant mental state in the reader's mind, ready to receive the sentiment of premarital love. The torment being suffered every minute at home from an irate mother and the pangs of separation from the lover form the main sentiment, with the sense of shame and a feeling of penitence induced by these words in the young man forming a subsidiary sentiment, in tune with the main.

The next pen picture is from the meadows showing girls suffering from loneliness occasioned by the separation from their lovers. The *kōṭal* flower which blooms with the first rains seems to tell the women that their lovers have failed them; the rain clouds raising thunderclaps seem to confirm this. On the top of all this comes the evening,

reminding them of the happy times in the past when their lovers were with them. To the unhappy girls the onset of the evening looks like the coming of executioners intent on killing them. Here is the verse:

The girl speaks

When the kōṭal blooms
Like an upraised oar,
And the dusky rain clouds
Set up a roar
In the skies above,
The evening comes
To the lonely women
Whose lovers stay
Too far away
To fold them in
A tight embrace,
The evening stalks
The hapless girls
Like a heartless killer!

(Aintiṇai Eḻupatu 17)

By the time the love lyrics of the 18 books came to be composed, the fountain of creativity was drying up, after five hundred years of gushing forth with a force and a consistency not commonly met with. The concepts and even the basic experiences that poets had used up in the heyday of this Golden Age were worked in by less gifted composers to make up these books of the Third Library. Further,the poems that find a place in the *Kuṟuntokai* and *Naṟṟiṇai*, for instances, were selected by men of discernment from out of a large number of candidates and only the very best got into the final list. There are poets represented in these anthologies by only one poem or two of 4-8 lines whose chiselled perfection should have been attained after composing hundreds of pieces; this indicates the rigour of the selective process. The works of *Akam* included in the Third Library, on the other hand, were each

written by one author whose 50, 70 and 150 stanzas went to make up the book. There was no objective judgement involved in the process of what to include in the work. This factor alone makes for a mighty difference in the quality of the works compared. It may be added here that even within the works composed during the height of the *Caṅkam* civilization, there is a noticeable difference in quality between those whose contents were selected from out of a large number of separate poems like the *Kuṟuntokai* and a work like the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* which consists of five sections of one hundred poems each, each section composed (clearly in accord with a design) by a different poet. Though the poets of the latter work were the same whose separate poems have been included in the former, the quality of the former will be found by the observant dilettante to be distinctly higher. Indeed, every one of the verses included among the two collections, the *Kuṟuntokai* and the *Naṟṟiṇai* is of a blameless quality, each recording a unique experience observed and presented by the character viewing it from the point of the greatest vantage. One is unable to whip up such an enthusiasm for the other work where, after the selection of the 5 poets no other exercise of objective judgment was made.

We would certainly like to know more about this unique process of selection of the verses to make up these anthologies. In a modern book, this process would have been referred to and even described in the preface or the introduction. But ancient Indians did not believe in such exercises and we are perhaps never destined to know how they went about making their choices. Two things are clear by inference, however. The person or the committee that did the selection must have been gifted with a rare power of literary discernment; and they were allowed to exercise their judgement without any external interference, without fear or favour, without allowing any non-literary criterion to prevail in the matter of selection. It is left to the gentle reader to find an answer to the question whether we can expect such a committee of men gifted with the power of infallible judgment to be nominated in the first

place and then for it to function wholly uninfluenced by extra-literary considerations, under today's conditions.

So much has been said relating to *Akam* poetry. *Caṅkam* Tamils regarded *Akam* poetry as the highest creative effort of literary man. Tolkāppiyar in a Sūtram (56-*Akam*) commits himself to the statement that creative imagination is needed in the composition of *Akam* poetry and by implication clearly feels that *Puṟam* poetry does not need the exercise of that faculty. Apart from this assertion by the hoary grammarian, we have other evidence pointing to the high regard *Caṅkam* Tamils had for this class of poetry, in contradistinction to the *Puṟam*. They stipulated (though there is no specific sū tram for it) that every *Akam* poem should be presented as the version of one of the involved characters; this guiding principle will be found to have been followed universally in *Caṅkam Akam* poetry. Again they provided, through a specific sūtram in the *Tolkāppiyam*, against the reference to any identifying particulars of the characters involved, with the result that only personal pronouns are employed throughout *Caṅkam Akam* poetry. The purpose of this legislation is clearly to promote universalisation of the sentiment by discouraging the particular, the personal and the local. All this solicitousness was employed to safeguard the purity and the delicacy of *Akam* poetry. To the *Caṅkam* Tamils, *Akam* poetry was a priceless objet d'art which had to be cherished with all care and solicitous attention.

The Puṟam poetry

Now let us examine a few poems belonging to the *Puṟam* classification. It includes war poems, a great many of them, for battling was a way of life with the ancient Tamils as with all old civilizations. They went to war to annex territories but they also fought for honour and revenge, under the urge of the heroes' code which dominated their lives. But many casual readers of old Tamil fall into the error of

assuming that all Puram is about war, about invasions and sieges of forts and the dance of goblins feasting on the corpses in the battlefield. In reality, *Akam* is an exclusive classification centered only on love but *Puram* is an inclusive concept which encompasses all other subjects of interest to man like home life, children, study and government and taxes and death; frustrated love, too, gets consigned to *Puram* as *Akam* accommodates only bipolar love, destined to get fulfilled.

The first illustrative poem is put in the version of a heroic mother who disclaims all knowledge of the whereabouts of her son for whom a girl comes enquiring. The poem is very short (of six lines) and is chiefly remarkable for the air of detachment displayed by the mother which is suggested by a telling analogy:

You lean on the pillar of my humble home
And enquire where my son could be found
I do not know, in truth, my child
Where he is, now. This womb that bore him
Is like the stony cave the tiger chooses
For its stay during the day and knows no more.
I am his mother, he was born of me
But I cannot guide you. Go forth and seek him
Where the battle rages hot and fierce;
He may be found at the frontline, fighting. (16)

(*Puranāṉūṟu 86*)

Kapilar, one of the most renowned poets of the age once went to the palace of Kāri, the reputed patron of poets. He was perhaps busy with the affairs of the state and hearing that a number of poets had come, he instructed an assistant to carry presents of equal value to them. The other poets accepted the gifts gratefully but Kapilar refused it and sent a poem through the minion to the king which taught him sternly a fine point in the art of literary patronage:

If a patron is known
To give without stint,
Suppliants in numbers
Will repair to him
From the four directions
And its easy enough
For a man of means
To distribute wealth.
He's rarer to find,
The discerning patron
Who can measure quality.
If, mighty king,
You knew this secret
You would not order
An even division
Of largesse among
The suppliant poets. (17)

(Puṟanāṉūṟu 121)

There is a melancholy poem on the same subject of poet-patron relations but striking an altogether different key. Poets had been greatly attached to the Chieftain Cāttaṉ of Ollaiyūr not because he was a gooḍ giver but on account of his qualities of warm friendship and sincere appreciation of good creativity. When he died, a poet, Kuṭavāyil Kīrattaṉār sings this doleful poem that plucks at our heartstrings:

Mullai! No one shall pluck your bloom!
Not the young warriors not the girls
Not the singer that strums his lute
Nor the songstress, from this fateful day
Shall wear your blossom as in the happy days
When Cāttaṉ lived, the triumphant victor
Of manly battles! Cāttaṉ's dead,

The mighty lancer is silent, still.
How can you put forth flowers now?
With Cāttan̲ dead, how can you bloom? (18)

(Pur̲anān̲ūr̲u 242)

Here is a song of anguished love representing the heartwail of a young girl whose husband has died fighting. She addresses his body lying in the field of battle, alternately showing an awareness of his death and a deluded belief that he is still alive, making the poem one of the most moving in all *caṅkam* literature:

If I exclaim in anguished pain
The tiger may hear and carry you off.
I tried to lift and carry you
But you're too heavy with your chest expansive.
May Death suffer the same heartache
That I undergo, for bringing you down.
Catch hold, my love, of my bangled wrist,
Let's walk to the shady mountain copse.
Come let us go, not tarry longer! (19)

(Pur̲anān̲ūr̲u 255)

Here is another of the same sentiment but very different in approach. There is no delusion here, the girl knows her husband is dead. Her words are addressed to the potter who has been commissioned to make a bier of earth in which the dead man will be buried.

O king of potters, O king of potters,
Like a small white lizard on the spoke of a wheel
I've journeyed with him through the snags of life
Unseparated: take pity on me
And make your bier roomy, spacious
For the two of us, for him and me!
Design your bier, O king of potters
That we may lie, he and I
Unseparated till the end of time! (20)

(Pur̲anān̲ūr̲u 256)

There are two works in the First Library devoted wholly to *Puṟam* themes; the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* is much the better of the two, for the reason we have already discussed, that it was compiled after a process of meticulous selection. The other, the *Patiṟṟuppattu* (the Ten Decads) consists of panegyrics by ten poets on ten Cera Kings, involving no objective selection by a compiler. But as eminent poets and a poetess were involved in the composition, we do find some passages of merit in it. The poems are usually small, with one or two in each decad, a little longer, the longest piece being of 57 lines.

Kuṭṭuvaṉ, the king, never ceases to fight
And the suppliants are gifted after every battle
With a ceaseless stream of mammoth elephants.
And the words of praise are heard without cease -
Praise of the king from the crowds assembled
To witness the dance of handsome girls
In the streets lighted by upstanding lamps
Fed with ghee that keeps spilling over,
Streets where the flags from every house
Wave in the breeze, looking even like
The silvern cascades on the mountain slopes. *(21)*
(Patiṟṟuppattu 47)

There is a work, called *Paripāṭal* after the metre employed which is unusual in carrying both *Puṟam* and *akam* poems. Much of the work has been lost and only 24 poems remain, of which 15 are on *Puṟam* and the rest on *akam* themes. All the 15 on *Puṟam* are religious poems on Tirumāl and Murukaṉ. They must be regarded as the models for the minstrel-saints of a later day who sang on Tirumāl, Siva and Murukaṉ. These poems included in *Paripāṭ al* are a little longer than those in the other anthologies but not very long, by absolute standards. Let us savour a selection of passages from one of the poems on Tirumāl:

You are the code of morals
Brahmins strive to cherish!

You are the flowing grace
With which you bless the men
Who long for you, who love you!
You are the spotless strength
With which you uplift those
That lack capacity.
You are the holy terror
That strikes panicky fear
In those that detest you!
....
You are the beneficient cloud,
And the expansive firmament
The earth and the towering mountain,
The home of eternal snows!
All things and states you are!
There is no one with whom
One can cite a likeness!
Man's efforts to find
A metaphor for you
Prove fruitless, aborted.
You can be compared, Lord
That wield a golden discus,
With only yourself,
Peerless, unequalled! (22)

(*Paripāṭal 1*)

The moral aphorisms

The development of *nīti* literature was a phenomenon that seems bound up with the increasing influence of the north over the Tamil land. Among the earliest works of the *Cankam* period that survive, there is not a single one devoted wholly to aphoristic counsel. The

poets of the first two Libraries used ethical concepts during the course of their composition, more of them in the *Puṟam* than in the *Akam*, naturally. A small number of pieces in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* are entirely devoted to moralising; the pieces Nos. 192, 358 and 366 can be cited as typical illustrations; these are pessimistic in tone; the poem (No. 214) by King Kōpperuñ cōḻaṉ, on the other hand, is a remarkable piece, urging people to think big and wholly optimistic in the attitude revealed. But this is not a discernible trend and must be relegated to the level of exceptions. In *Akam* poetry, we find an occasional flash of ethical import, usually flung at the young man by the intrepid friend of the girl; but this is always very relevant, even vital to the issue that occupies the centre of the stage. For instance in a poem in *Naṟṟiṇai*, while accusing the lover of arrogance due to wealth leading to a neglect of the love-lorn girl, her friend points out that wealth does not consist in dashing about in fast-moving vehicles and in bravado but is displayed in the form of compassion to those in trouble (210). The *Akam* poets were concerned only with the efficient transfer of emotion-centred experience; religious, philosophical or ethical references were made only to subserve this supreme purpose. The *Puṟam* poets were much less preoccupied with the transfer of experience and their interest could be enlisted in moral questions; but they too were not moral legislators, sworn to the task of reforming society.

The increasing influence of the north over Tamil land created an interest in moral aphorisms. Thoughtful historians have found that when political and social instability and confusion reign, religion, philosophy and moralisation get a boost in the land. After the settled society and political stability (despite the frequent wars) of the *Caṅkam* era, the Tamil land entered upon a period of foreign rule when the Tamil language and the cherished values of the people were on the downgrade. This was the period when the works of the third library with its predominance to moral teaching came to be composed. The Sanskritists of the north were compulsive moralists who could write whole

parvas of moral and philosophical teaching as part of great epics like the *Mahabharata* as well as complete books (of a smaller size) like the *Sukraniti*. Their influence brought this predilection for moralising into the Tamil country at the right time when it was going through conditions of flux in all walks of life. The combination of these two factors spawned books of moral aphorisms like the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, the *Nālaṭiyār* and the ten other works of this kind forming the third library.

The Tirukkuṟaḷ

Of these the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is justly famous for its pithy wisdom, the vast experience behind each of the verses, their universal applicability which the lapse of time and national borders have not been able to whittle down and the literary finish of the stanzas. It is the most widely translated of all Tamil works and consequently the best known all the world over. It is divided into three books-the first, devoted to moral teaching, the second to an expatiation of political, economic and administrative concepts and the third to love of the *Akam* classification. The third book can be left out of consideration as there is little in it that has not been better said in the first library of eight anthologies. Tiruvaḷḷuvar, the author of the work was a stern moralist who, perhaps, did not feel at home in the terrain of love. Moreover, the extremely short metre he chose for the entire work (mainly on the basis of its suitability for moral teaching) did not permit the painting of the flora and the fauna and other features of the five types of land which could be effectively used to evoke the appropriate sentiment, as in the *Akam* books of the first library. Hence examples only from the first two books of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* will be shown here to help the reader to get an idea of this class of writing in the ancient Tamil land.

On the virtue of forbearance, *Tirukkuṟaḷ* has this to say:

Ephemeral is the pleasure
One gets out of retaliation.

But to the one that bears
Harm done, with forbearance
There is fame everlasting. (23)

(T K 156)

From the pessimism of the Jains, Tiruvaḷḷuvar learnt to overvalue the power of destiny. Here is a stanza on the way it works, occurring in the second book.

Destiny makes for a great
Divide in the lives of men
Some turn out to be wealthy,
Others are blessed with wisdom. (24)

(T K 374)

The great moralist proffers sage counsel against gambling with a telling metaphor all worked into the tiny capsule of a stanza:

Never indulge in gambling
Profitable though it may be.
Gambling gains spell danger
Like the angler's bait to the fish. (25)

(T.K 931)

The same severely moralistic tone prevails all through the *Nālaṭiyār* which is reckoned second only to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in merit. Let us hear a Jain sage inveighing against the institution of courtesans, putting it in the words of a chaste wife:

Even after years of living together,
With me and him in tight embrace
Every night through all these years,
I still feel shy when he is around,
As shy, indeed, as on that day
We first came together. What feelings fill
The breasts of callgirls who, for lucre,

Lie locked in embrace with a different man
On every night? (26)

(*Nālaṭiyār* 385)

The work is entirely built up of four-liners (hence the title *Nālaṭiyār*) and hence the canvas is bigger than that of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. The additional space is harnessed by the poets of the *Nālaṭiyār* to cite an illustrative metaphor or include two or three cases of the same type in one stanza; but with all this increase in the area for play, these poets could not produce the effect in *Akam* poetry which Tiruvaḷḷuvar could and nowhere near that which the earlier poets of the first library could generate.

True literature does not profess to teach the reader or sermonize to him; it is not intended as a source of enlightenment, though it well may do so, incidentally. Its only purpose is to delight the reader through the transference of a significant experience. A.C. Bradley in his Oxford Lectures on Poetry ("Shelley's view of Poetry") has this interesting observation to make on the point: " Alike in his Preface and in the Defence (of Poetry) he takes up most decidedly the position that the poet ought neither to affect a moral aim nor to express his own conceptions of right and wrong. 'Didactic Poetry' Shelley declares, "is my abhorrence: nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse' ".

Neglect of Caṅkam literature

Hence all this moralizing and the guidelines about statecraft, even if expertly done as in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, does not entitle the work to rank as high literature. The *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is peerless, unmatched, as a book of guidance for life, and, consequently must be classified among the books of knowledge and not as literature. The ancient Tamils understood this distinction but later generations were less sure of aesthetic criteria and tended to undervalue the earlier *Caṅkam* works. This process went on

for centuries and fewer and fewer copies were made of them. The baneful result was that in the three centuries before the present this great literature received less and less attention even from scholars who spent all their energies on works of much lesser merit. That a scholar of the excellence of Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai could go through an eventful career of Tamil teaching and composition without knowing anything of this great literature is a clear index of the tendency of the times.

There were two other reasons for the neglect of the first two libraries of the *Caṅkam* Age. One was that, as hand-copying of works was the only method of dissemination till recently and that was always difficult and time-consuming, utility determined what works to copy and multiply. Works of moral aphorisms could be prescribed in the curricula for scholastic studies more safely than love poetry and hence works of greater and lesser value purveying aphorisms came to be copied much more than the *Kuṟuntokai* and the *Naṟṟiṇai*. This process going on for centuries resulted in the virtual disappearance of the latter. Among the thousands of manuscripts being catalogued now by the Institute of Asian Studies, the preponderant number appears to be school textbooks; and works of pure literary value with a clear secular bent form a negligible minority.

We used the word, 'secular' for, works on religion and philosophy which are beyond the level of a school curriculum were also multiplied to cater to the needs of a wide readership. One of the major changes in public values and tastes that took place in the Tamil land after 300 A.D. was the development of a strong religious spirit with an undercoating of pessimism and it is possible that this development was accompanied by an erosion of aesthetic values. Works of no literary value at all and of doubtful religious value like *piḷḷaitamiḻ* poems on obscure deities and *talapurāṇams* on insignificant temples were copied and multiplied with zeal; of the early *Caṅkam* works it is *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* with its religious content that is available in a

number of copies in the manuscript libraries today though that is by no means the best or the most important of the works of the first two libraries.

An argument is sometimes advanced that it is because the *Caṅkam* works are very old and are written in an archaic language, recondite, difficult to comprehend that they are not popular today. It is true that *Caṅkam* works contain usages that are not current today; but good commentaries are available and no reader of today is likely to be puzzled for long over the significance of any passage. On the other hand they do not employ the dozens of verbal tricks which we see in the later works, the double entendre, the far-fetched conceits and round-about expressions which reign triumphant in works in the place of genuine imagination and uncontrived poetic excellence. Words are used in their essential sense as sanctioned by semantics in *Caṅkam* works and a person who is familiar with a thousand lines of *Caṅkam* poetry can read on further with greater ease than the passages of the post-classical era.

We have covered the origin of the short verse which was the first literary genre of all old civilizations and of Tamil in particular. The short verses on love and war and statecraft and personal reflections of the *Caṅkam* era could hold their own against the best of their kind produced anywhere in the world. This high quality of the verses themselves produced over a long and fruitful era, coupled with the brilliantly conceived literary conventions of the society and the atmosphere of the era where poets were highly regarded by the king and the people leads a modern critic to wonder if there could be another society to match the *Caṅkam* Tamil in the long history of civilization. A quick examination of these productive eras will reveal the truth of this statement.

The Chinese golden age of poetry under the Tangs did produce great poetry of the literary kind (like the poems of Li Po and Tu Fu) but the golden age was short lived, lasting for a mere three hundred years.

The Egyptian was seldom wholly literary and religious and story interest were brought in to bolster up their work. The Rig Vedic poems were almost wholly religious and suktas of pure literary value are extremely difficult to encounter among them. The best of Greek literature was the epic which depended very largely in the story interest and the drama where a combination of many factors like props, music and acting which are non-literary functioned to produce delight. The literatures of the three old Mesopotamian civilizations cannot measure upto the quality of the *Caṅkam* works and there was a significant religious element in them. It can therefore be stated without contradiction that if the three dimensions of pure literary quality without digressive elements, excellence and quantity and period of production were taken together, the early *Caṅkam* literature will be found to reign at the very top of world literature.

The exquisite Muttoḷḷāyiram

The appeal of the short poem seems to have continued to attract poets and patrons and dilettantes even after the *Caṅkam* period. In fact the custom has continued down to recent times, though the quality of the later productions has been very uneven. There is a work entitled the Muttoḷḷāyirum which has been lost to us; but an anthology of later days has fortunately preserved for posterity about 108 of the quatrains from this work. There are two views about the total number of poems in the work; one is that it was three times nine hundred or 2700; the other is that there were only 900 verses sung on the three titled kings of the Tamil land. There are, however, no two views about the quality of the work. For even from the small number of stanzas that have come down to us, one could see what a master of this genre the nameless poet should have been. He sings with verve on war and love; and though he is much indebted to the poets of *Kuṟuntokai* and *Puṟanāṉūṟu* and owes much to the *Caṅkam* conventions, he brings a freshness and notable lyrical sense to this effort. He uses the *veṇpā* metre like the poets of the

later *Cankam* era; and perhaps for this reason his work is very popular with the people who have a prejudice against the order *Cankam* pieces in the āciriyappā metre.

Here are two songs on the martial exploits of the Pāṇṭiya king:

The Pāṇṭiya rules-with his shoulders jewelled,
And a lace of the whitest pearls on his chest
Under a comely broad white umbrella-
The Pāṇṭiya monarch rules the world!
And the gods bedecked with gold and gems
Guard themselves from the transgression
Of treading with their handsome feet
The Pāṇṭiya's earth! (27)

There is a mythological belief that the gods do not tread the earth, they walk above it. The poet puts it down to their respect and even fear for the king.

When the chieftains and the vassal kings
Descry the moon-like umbrella
Of the Pāṇṭiya with the wreath of lilies blue
Mounted on the royal pachyderm,
They converge shouting, "Here we come,
O king of kings, with the tribute due!"
But finding the crowd near the elephant
Too dense to pierce, they stand transfixed
Lamenting at the edge of the throng,
"Is this just? Are you fair to us?" (28)

The love pieces in Muttoḷḷāyiram

The poet's pieces on love are subtle and satisfying. A subtle literary device adopted with great dexterity by our poet is to focus the beam of light not on the main characters, but on trivial things on purpose;

somehow, the point of the poem comes out effectively, not in spite of this shifting of focus but actually on account of it. In the poem given below, a girl thanks the carpenter who had drilled a trial hole in the door through which she could gaze on the Pāṇṭiya king and draw sustenance; the intense love of the girl, her despair on being confined to a room and her wonderful sense of fulfillment on discovering the hole all come out most artistically, helped by his device.

"Remain confined, a prisoner, here!"
My mother cried out and shut me in
A guarded room in a guarded house.
I cast about for anything
That would set me free, would let me see him
And presto! found a trial hole
Abandoned for a better one,
Through which to drink his comeliness.
I was saved: but how shall I
Ever repay the dept I owe
To the carpenter that had drilled the hole? (29)

In another, the poet concentrates on the vicissitudes of the hinges on the city doors. For the doors were frequently opened by the eager daughters and closed by the censorious mothers the day the Cēra king drove in state through the streets of the city. The poet draws the pointed attention of the reader to the wear and tear suffered by the hinges of the front doors and somehow we get a vivid picture of the conflicting interests of the girls in love and their angry mothers. Here is the poem:

Mothers shut and their daughters opened
The front-doors of houses in the capital town
Of Kotai who wears a wreath on his head
Who drives a chariot with the fleetest horses-
Daughters to gaze and mothers to stop them,
Without respite the long day through-
They were hard on the hinges on the day he drove by;

Every hinge of every front-door
Of every one of the city houses
Got worn away on the hectic day
He chose to drive through his capital town! (30)

We have a poem on the love of a girl for the Cōḻa king. She had looked upon him merely when he came out on a procession and love had been born. There was and could have been no union between the king and his humble subject. But people noticed her emaciation and started gossiping about her; and the very critical mother began to chastise her with the rod. The hapless girl's lament is that she gets blamed for a crime she has not committed. This is lighted up by a beautiful metaphor which incidentally shows the scientific temper of the poet:

Mother spanks me with a cruel rod
The neighbours lash their deadly tongues;
I am, indeed, in the same sad plight
(In respect of the Cōḻa king)
As the toad accused of devouring,
Without cracking the crusty shell,
The inner kernel of the coconut. (31)

When coconuts turn up with no meat inside, the old belief was that a toad must have absorbed it from the outside without damaging the shell covering it. The poet does not subscribe to this belief, considering that the toad is innocent of the felony.

The long poem of the Caṅkam era

We now move on to a study of the next genre, the long poems of the *Caṅkam* era which arose naturally from out of the short verses. Ten long poems were collected under the title the Ten poems (Pattuppāṭṭu) at the end of the *Caṅkam* period; it is not known if there were more and these ten were selected out of a large number. While their quality is

good and their diction and the manner in which the metre has been handled are not noticeably different from those of the short verses, there is a factor which points to their later age, after the poems of the eight anthologies had been composed. In the earlier poems where the poets begin developing the sentiment of love, they take the greatest care to conform to the *Akam* conventions; one convention specially is never broken, that relating to keeping names and signs of personal identification of the pieces. They had no difficulty in observing this convention even in the longest poems in the *Akanāṉūṟu* and the *Paripāṭal* and the *Kalittokai*.. But here, in the long poems, the poets develop the love theme for hundreds of lines, keeping off all names meticulously from them and then let in a name or a clear sign pointing to a person, in the last passage; thus the poem that, by name and design is a love poem gets consigned to *Puṟam*. The *Paṭṭiṉappālai* (301 lines) mentions the name of the hero the Cōḻa King Tirumāvaḷavaṉ at the very end; the Neṭunalvāṭai refers to the neem flower, the symbolic flower of the Pāṇṭiyas, even though the entire spirit of the works is romantic and the prevailing sentiment, love and the anguish of separated lovers. This feature is so significant, these pieces must be chronologically considered as belonging to a later period when the need for rigorous conformity with the conventions had undergone a certain dilution.

Out of the ten poems, only two, the *Mullaippāṭṭu* and the *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* are genuinely *Akam* poems that remain within that privileged classification till the end, unwarped by any personal references, unlike in the two cases cited above. The rest of the work (the six remaining poems) is all *Puṟam*. Out of them five belong to a class called *āṟṟuppaṭai* where, a poor artiste who has received largesse from a rich patron directs another to him for similar favour. The sixth is of a different class treating of the instability of human glory, the mortality of man and the impermanence of all created things; this genre is called *kāñci*.

To get an idea of how this class of long poems is structured, we shall discuss the design of some of them in slight detail. From this discussion it would become apparent that these long poems, too, develop only a single concept, the greater length being due to longer descriptions, a more leisurely way of dealing with cities and the countryside and the way of life of the people. To use modern metaphor, these long poems can be compared to long short stories of the type written by Thomas Mann and Somerset Maugham ,rather than to novels or novelettes. The basic structure of these long poems still remains extremely simple like that of the short poems.

The Paṭṭiṉappālai

The first of these two will be the *Paṭṭiṉappālai* with 301 lines. The basic subject-content of this long poem is simply told. The hero wishes to leave his home and his beloved to go forth to distant places so that he may earn the wherewithal to run his household and perform the duties of a householder towards guests. His journey, he realises would lead him over inhospitable deserts; the girl he loves would not be comforted by all his promise of an early return and would waste away during the separation. The hero grapples with the part of his own mind that urges him to undertake the journey and pointing out the harm it may do to his beloved he decides against the project. This is all there is to it; such a theme has been told in 10 to 20 lines in the *Naṟṟiṇai* and the *Akanāṉūṟu* and even in the shorter compass of the *Kuṟuntokai* effectively. The same theme is here told in 301 lines.

How does the poet do it? The reader may be surprised to be told that the first 218 lines are devoted to a description of the river Kāviri and the city of Pukār situated at the point of its merging with the sea. Much space is taken up by portraits of the prosperity of the city, its military installations, its harbour and the fishermen's quarters, its thriving business district and extensive residential section. While the

descriptions are beautiful with the clarity the vividness and the economy of words that characterise *Caṅkam* poetry, it is a point for the serious consideration of literary critics how such a detailed description of a fertile riverrine city could introduce a poem cast in the *pālai* mode. Such vivid portrayal of a city is met with only in *marutam* poems, never in *pālai* pieces. *Caṅkam* poetry is all about the creation of a proper mental atmosphere which is made ready to receive the central sentiment of the poem. This long description of the most fertile part of Tamil Nadu fed by its most important river is scarcely a fitting introduction to a poem cast in the *pālai* mode.

But this is incidental to our point which concerns the nature of the digressive material with which the poet has packed his poem. He devotes another 67 lines to a description of the martial prowess of the Cōḻa King who beautified his capital city with the aid of the spoils of war. Only five lines are devoted to the *pālai* part of the central idea, that is, the separation that is averted owing to hero's assessment of the delights of love as much superior to the comforts which wealth may bring. It seems a very lop-sided allotment of space to the two elements as revealed in the title; and the older practitioners of Tamil muse would have devoted far more space and given far greater stress to the sentiment than to the physical surroundings, which, significantly are not evocative of the sentiment.

The Maturaikkāñci

The *Maturaikkāñci* is the longest among the ten poems with 782 lines. *Kāñci*, as explained earlier, is the genre where the ephemerality of life and youth and possession is emphasised. In this long work, the passage that emphasises the impermanence or the *kāñci* part which must be regarded as the central theme of the whole poem occupies no more than 29 lines! The rest, i.e. 753 lines, is devoted to a description of the Pāṇṭiya's martial prowess and of the city of Maturai. Post-classical

Tamil literature is shot through with a deep pessimism and poets delighted in holding forth on topics like the impermanence of life and possessions and of sensory pleasure. This trend started with the advent of Jain influence in the south which may be put down to after 300 A.D. If the author of a professed *kāñci* thought fit to devote only 29 lines or 3.7% of it to a development of the *kāñci* kernel, he must have flourished considerably before the advent of the Jain influence. While the poet's handling of the love theme in the *Paṭṭiṉappālai* shows a literary level of priorities of an era distinctly later that those of the eight anthologies, this poet's handling of the *kāñci* theme must place him considerably earlier than Tiruvaḷḷuvar and the authors of the *Nālaṭiyār*. This would call for a much greater sprawl or range of time for the *Cankam* period than is normally conceded; perhaps the earliest poems of the *Kuṟuntokai* were composed around 600-700 B.C. (though anthologised much later) and the last of the Third Library works, around 500 A.D. This would satisfactorily account for the two phenomena discussed above.

As there are as many as five works cast in the mould of *Āṟṟ uppaṭai*, it may be profitable to discuss the general design of this genre. The patron chosen is usually a king; in the case of the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, it is Lord Murukaṉ. The beneficiary and his friend whom he directs to the patron are drawn from the class of poets or actors or minstrels and all of them can be assumed to be impecunious, needing the support of patrons. The work gains in size through detailed descriptions of the greatness of the patron, his capital city and sometimes the territory through which the directed one has to travel to reach him.

The Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai

The *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, thus describes the six bivouacs at which Lord Murukaṉ camped during His campaign against Cūraṉ which have now become places of pilgrimage to His devotees and ends with a thrilling portrait of the congregation around Him and the way He would

welcome the poet and bless him in such a way there is no equal to him in this world in pelf and grace. The way the poet portrays the worship of the brahmins in *Tiruvērakam* and of the hunters in the hills in contrasting pictures where the only constant common element is the sincerest devotion with which the worship is done is very poetically appealing. The work has been composed by Nakkīrar regarded as the president of the Poets' Assembly during the *Caṅkam* period. This enjoys greater popularity than all the other long poems put together on account of its religious value. It must, however, be stated here that this poem places much greater stress on poetic than on religious values and is very different in construction, contents and atmosphere from the hymnal works of later days.

The other ā<u>rr</u>uppaṭai works

The *Porunarā<u>rr</u>uppaṭai* is a poem addressed to a class of actors called *porunar* who declaim verses on war and other themes. The opening passage describes the actor and his wife, the penurious conditions under which they have been living and the fatigue of the journey undertaken. The next 65 lines narrate the manner in which the beneficiary had received the king's generous largess. Nearly 30 lines then describe what benefits the second actor could expect from the king. The poem ends with a glowing description of the king himself, his person, his martial prowess and the prosperity of his country fed by the Kāviri. The poem has been composed by a poetess whose lameness has turned out to be a badge of honour by which she was known; the name is Muṭattāmakkaṇṇiyār. Her descriptions are vivid and they ring true without a false note; her versification is very facile and uncontrived.

There are two other works of this type involving minstrels; let us pass them over and take up the *Malaipaṭukaṭām* where an actor who takes part in street plays directs another to a king called Na<u>n</u> <u>n</u>a<u>n</u>. It is a long poem of 583 lines and is primarily notable for its very sympa-

thetic portrayal of mountain tribes who dwell in the uplands through which the actor with his kin has to pass to reach the king's capital. The beneficiary presents a heartwarming picture of the hospitable mountain folk who ply the wayfarer with the choicest meats and drinks and lovingly invite him to break his journey and stay with them for sometime. The actor is warned not to succumb to the invitation of these simple people and overstay there but to proceed on his journey, as his objective is to see the king and obtain his largess. The portrait of the hillfolk and their guileless good nature is one of the most appealing passages in the whole poem. The rigours of the journey are then described; the poem concludes with a portrait of the king's fertile domains and the king's own munificent nature which makes him heap expensive presents on the suppliants.

The akam poems

The two poems on *Akam* themes are shorter in comparison; the *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* has 261 lines and the *Mullaippāṭṭu*, the shortest in the entire collection is of 103 lines only. The former has been composed by Kapilar, the most celebrated among the *Caṅkam* poets; but, in quality, this does not rank as high as his shorter poems. There is a tradition that this was composed in order to teach an Aryan King, Tamil language and literature. This may be true , seeing how the poet has introduced all the possible variant sub themes of the *kuṟiñci* in this, thus making it read rather like a 'complete guide to *kuṟiñci* for school use' rather than an inspired poem composed to give pleasure. The *Mullaippāṭṭu* is more interesting; it depicts the pangs of separation of a lady during the absence of her husband on a military expedition and the atmosphere of the war-camp. The sorrow of the love-lorn lady ends when she hears the sound of the bells worn by her husband's horses bringing him back to her. The poem ends with a colourful picture of the meadowland where flowers of varied hues bloom lending cheer to the returning

hero. These two love poems, too, describe only single, unitary experiences though the descriptions take up a certain space. They too therefore deserve to be called lengthened short poems and hence do not merit being assigned to a separate genre merely on account of their size.

Some selected passages

Let us now savour a few fragments from these long poems (or lengthened short poems) to get the flavour of this type of composition. The first extract will be from the only religious poem in this collection, the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*. The dance of the celestial damsels is portrayed in this piece.

On the sky-high mountain where the big bamboo grows
Dance celestial damsels with bright feet wearing anklet bells,
Clad in flowered garments of a natural red,
Like the intirakōpa; wearing a seven chained girdle
Possessed of a beauty which owes nothing to artifice,
In their hair uniformly long, and oiled bright,
Their maids have stuck the blooms of the red-stemmed veṭci
And the petals of the fragrant, green-stalked lily,
And the jewels set in their proper places- (32)

In the *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* where one minstrel guides another to King Toṇṭaimāṉ of Kāñci to obtain presents as he himself had done, the women-folk of the merchant class are described in an elegant passage:

The women decked with jewels, solid and spherical,
Walk like the peacock in its feathered glory
Delightedly cawing on the high hills,
Or to the tinkling of their red-gold anklets play,
Hitting the stringed ball, on the lofty terraces
Of their sky-topping mansions; and when they tire,

Gently throw the golden 'kaḻal beans' on the pearly sand,
The narrow bracelets on their wrists quivering as they move
(33)

There is a fine description of the harbour in Pukār in the finely designed *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, from which the following piece is taken :

Scarce diminished by this levy
Here goods of every kind pile up,
Coming ceaselessly past reckoning
From sea to land, from land to sea,
As in the season of the rains
The clouds pour water on the hills
From the sea, and the water flows
Back from the hills into the sea. (34)

It is proposed to give two short pieces from the shortest of the poems, the *Mullaippāṭṭu*.The first photographs some kinswomen attached to the languishing heroine obtaining an omen presaging the early return of the young man; they worship god and strew paddy and flowers and wait, concealed for some words spoken by a stranger not intended for them, but carrying a message for them (this is known as listening to the viricci):

A little shepherd lass, hugging her shivering shoulders,
Called to the fretting younglings turning round and round,
Tied by the leg to their short tether ropes,
'Your mothers will be here presently; they come,
Driven before the herdsman with his cruel stick.'
'We heard those words of good omen, and by them know,
As by those the wise men heard, that our liege lord,
With tribute levied on the foeman's captured land,
Is coming, his work done; cease thy anxious grieving,
(35)

And the last piece is the report of the happy consummation for while the love-lorn lady lies pining for her young man's return, "there falls on her intent ear the distant noise of horses neighing" pulling the lover's chariot homewards.

Along the red-loam highway, through the fertile woods,
Where in the fine sand the close-leaved kāya blooms
Collyrium-black, and cassia with its shoots and jets
Rains golden spray, and the furled white kāntaḷ buds
Open like the spread palm, and clustered kāntaḷ red
Splashes blood-through the waving rain-fed ragi corn
Where the buck with the twisted horn bounds with the timid

doe,
On that early day of Asadh he hastes on,
Spurring the flying steeds of his lofty, shining car. (36)

To conclude this part of the discussion, the *Caṅkam* poets forged out a pattern of short poems whose appeal was enhanced by the poetically creative conventions by which they were guided. The lasting contribution of the *Caṅkam* Age is this genre of a poem of limited length whose delicacy and power of suggestion is reinforced by the economy of words. Later ages were to throw up individual poets of great merit like Kampaṉ; but at no other period have the Muses been served by such a large number of gifted poets whose individuality is less apparent and of less significance than their wonderfully consistent uniformity of diction, descriptive talent and the infinite power of suggestion.

Chapter Three

THE FIRST GREAT EPICS

The end of the Caṅkam epoch

Every Golden Age has an expiry date stamped on it. The extraordinarily powerful creative forces of a society which help to usher in a high peak of cultural achievement have an in-built cycle of high and low efficacy; and after the peak is touched, the decay begins, always from the inside. When these forces weaken from factors that are inherent, external pressures like invasions are able to overwhelm the society and put out the flame of creativity with ease. This is the lesson we learn from a study of all the civilizations that have been chronicled. The external danger is quite obvious to the eye and looms large in the horizon; but the inner rot should have progressed enough in all these cases for the forces outside to des- troy the civilization.

The *Caṅkam* culture should have been in existence for a thousand years in the view of the present writer when the Kaḷappiras came from the immediate north to subjugate the Tamil country. It must have been prospering for the first three or four centuries building up those invaluable conventions and nourishing the creative potential of the race. It could have attained the peak in the 3rd century B.C. and continued at that dizzy level for perhaps three hundred years till the advent of Christ. This must have been the period when those wonderfully vibrant short poems of the *Kuṟuntokai* and *Naṟṟiṇai* were composed. The inner rot or the canker that eats the inner substance should have started in the early decades of the first century of the Christian era when the ten long poems were perhaps composed. If this time structure is admitted, the Nakkirar and the Kapilar to whom are ascribed two of the ten long

poems were perhaps composed. If this time structure is admitted, the Nakkirar and the Kapilar to whom are ascribed two of the ten long poems could have been later poets bearing the hallowed names of the great poets who flourished three centuries earlier.

The *Caṅkam* society with its inner rot progressed to an alarming extent was now ripe for an external aggressor to push it over with apparent ease, like a big piece of timber with its inside eaten away by termites falling to a light push from a mere child. It is also possible that these marauders had the vigour and stamina of a less cultivated people whose energies had not been sapped by long years of soft living and a preoccupation with art and literature. In the history of civilizations we come across many instances of barbarians living all around a patch of civilization overwhelming it as the angry sea overruns a sandy island. But in every one of the cases these surrounding hordes have patiently awaited signs of inner decay in the civilized society before they advanced on it.

That the *Caṅkam* society was ripe for a push over could be inferred from many tell-tale signs. The first of them is a question of duration-the *Caṅkam* civilization had gone on for too long and it is a law of nature that no golden period can last for ever. The second sign is the reference to innumerable wars in the *Caṅkam* works themselves; while wars were confined to the combatants in those days, it was the invariable custom for the victor to despoil the lands of the vanquished so that they were rendered unsuitable for agriculture. The heroes' code was insistent that a defeated hero should seek retribution; and so, after his defeat he goes about collecting an army and armaments and, seeking the best time for an attack, makes war on the victor king. So this ding-dong battling went on with very deleterious consequences on agriculture, trade and the cultural life. The Tamil society exhausted itself in wars; the three Tamil kings were seldom at peace with each other; these were therefore internecine wars which weakened all of them.

The standard of literary excellence which deteriorated to a marked extent from the first to the second library of works also should be taken to be a sign of a general decay of the inner life of the people. The *Akam* conventions which provided for the uniquely virile literature of the earlier days were largely given the go-bye and a potentially dangerous watering down of the traditions had already started. The literariness of literature was allowed to suffer adulteration; the purest kind of aesthetic appeal no longer gave pleasure and literature had to be spiced with other things like moralising, the incipient beginnings of a plot and lengthy descriptions often unsuited to evoke the correct sentiment. This is not a surprising development at all. On the other hand it is most amazing that a whole people could cherish and honour and imbibe pleasure from short poems which had no moral, religious or informational value which revealed only the minimum, leaving the rest to be inferred through suggestion, which in short, relied for their appeal entirely on their literary value. It is most amazing that a whole society could continue to be stimulated, sustained and delighted by such pure literature with no digressive elements in it for six to seven centuries. It is so unique a phenomenon that the present writer with some acquaintance with world literature is unable to cite a parallel as was pointed out earlier. It is not surprising that this spirit died when it did, it is surprising it could keep alive for so long.

We observed during the discussions of the third library of eighteen books that unlike the anthologies like the *Kuṟuntokai* where a mere four hundred poems were selected and compiled out of possibly thousands, the *Akam* works of this last series were each composed entirely by one person; they were not the result of a selective process. One inference from this (confirmed when we read the works) is that the quality must perforce be less. The other inference is that the compilers of this late period had so little to go on with they could not undertake a selective exercise, they just accepted these single-author works as there was nothing else. While quantity is not an invariable guide of

productivity in the field of culture, the fact that in the earlier centuries the Tamils could produce so many good poems from out of which the sparkling gems wreathed in *Kuruntokai* and *Narriṇai* could be selected and compiled is clearly indicative of the fecundity of high talent. And the fact that there is not a single anthology among the *Akam* works and with the exception of the *Nālaṭiyār*, none among the Nīti works too is indicative of an impoverished level of productivity, going with cultural decay.

But, though there was inner decay in the Tamil cultural world, external reasons did certainly contribute towards it collapse. One, of course, was that the Kaḷappiras were at a much lower level of culture and they did not take kindly to the superior attainments of the Tamils; and being the ruling race, they imposed their own standard on the Tamil society. Patronage of arts and letters was entirely in the hands of kings and chieftains in those days; as the Kaḷappira rulers (and the satraps under them who naturally reflected the views of the rulers) did not encourage the native poets and artistes, they languished and perhaps starved to death. Many *Caṅkam* poets had emphasised in their songs their almost biological need for intelligent appreciation of their poems by the patron more than the gifts of money and gold from him; a poem of this type has been quoted earlier. So this lack of discerning patronage must have choked off the fountain of creativity before physical deprivation began to wreak havoc among the poets and artistes.

The second was that the Kaḷappiras were Buddhists and preferred works with a religious bias; they had little stomach for the wholly secular literature of the early *Caṅkam* Tamils. We should not jump to the conclusion that this was a peculiar failing of the Buddhists. The later-day Hindus felt an aversion towards the great literary works of the Jains and the Buddhists. There was acrimonious criticism from the Hindus hurled against U.V.S. Aiyar who had published the Jain work, the *Cintāmaṇi*. It was indeed worse than this; for we hear of

and the minor epics for the epic became the popular literary genre of the New Age.

The Cilappatikāram

It is but natural that the first of the epics composed during this epoch, the *Cilappatikāram* was by a Jain and it exudes a Jain flavour. But, to put the records straight, it should at once be affirmed that the Jain-monk-author was a man of wonderfully catholic views; it should also be stated here that it is not so natural for a pioneering work that launched a new literary genre to be of such a surpassing quality. Pioneers are seldom the greatest in the field perhaps because they have no models before them to emulate, perhaps because their energies are largely spent in laying a path by cutting through the jungle of indifference and even opposition. Though there is a view (mostly held by pious Jains) that the *Cintāmaṇi* is the greatest of the five epics, true literary judgment will vote in favour of *Cilappatikaram* on the grounds of superior poetical quality, a coherent, homogeneous plot and unlike its rival, a dedicated, consistent emphasis on literary rather than on religious values.

One reason why works like the *Cintāmaṇi* are, as a matter of course, preferred over *Cilappatikāram* and *Caṅkam* works may be that many people are unable to appreciate the simple but elegant '*āciriyappā*' metre in which the latter is largely composed. Their preference is for the highly finished *viruttams* in which the *Cintāmaṇi* is written as also all the subsequent works. A highly renowned critic and dilettante of Tamil who bestrode the narrow world of Tamil letters in the first half of this century, T.K. Citamparanāta Mutaliyār dismissed *Caṅkam* literature as of no account, most probably because of the metre. His influence is still felt in the Tamil world and those who admire and follow his precepts (whose number is considerable) persevere still in the dislike of *Caṅkam* works.

Metre is a question of individual taste (all art is, for that matter) and the present writer does not propose to persuade this critical brigade to be kinder towards *Caṅkam*. But a significant point seems to be getting missed by all those who discuss this issue. All *viruttams* consist of four feet and many are quite long-footed. When a unit of an idea or experience is versified, it is not necessary that each such unit fits naturally into the steel framework of the metre selected; it usually does not, under the law of probabilities. In such cases, where the concept can be said effectively in less than four feet, the poet is naturally compelled to pack the rest of the space in that stanza with inconsequential packing material. A painstaking student can examine and report how the practice of using words in a loose and lax manner - words which do not contribute effectively to the purport of the stanza - a practice that has drawn quite a lot of justified criticism on itself from thoughtful Tamils and the westerners actually started from the era when poets gave up composing in the *āciriyappā* in favour of the *viruttams*.

The *āciriyappā*, on the other hand, has no rigid framework; a line is the unit and a poem can be in four lines or in 4000. When the concept or experience has been satisfactorily presented, the poet can conclude the poem; there is no need for him to seek fillers for the vacant spaces, cluttering his piece with words that do not add to the sense. The famed economy of words of *Caṅkam* poets owes a great deal to this liberating metre which did not need padding. Hence, in the view of the present writer, the fact that the *Cilappatikā ram* was composed in this metre and not in the rigid *viruttams* is another reason for its literary superiority over the *Cintāmaṇi*.

Let us get better acquainted, then, with this great epic, the *Cilappatikāram*. The story is simply told. Kōvalan̲ a scion of a wealthy family of traders marries Kaṇṇaki; this is an arranged marriage. Kōvalan̲ loves Kaṇṇaki who is wonderfully gifted with beauty and a loftiness of

character but he soon falls madly in love with Mātavi, a girl from a courtesan family. This Mātavi is one of the outstanding beauties of classical Tamil, fantastically accomplished in dance and music; these accomplishments are not very unusual among courtesans; what was very unique in her case was her overwhelming love for Kōvalaṉ, not tainted by the grabbing love of lucre which is characteristic of her class everywhere, at all times. Indeed it is a matter for debate (and it is being debated endlessly in Tamil forums) whether Kaṇṇaki's or Mātavi's was the greater love.

Though Mātavi did not demand them, Kōvalaṉ went onshowering her with Kaṇṇaki's ornaments and other valued possessions till there was nothing left with him to give away or almost nothing. And one day, when they had bathed in the sea, they began reciting poems to entertain each other. Mātavi's poem of love cast in the *Caṅ kam* mọuld with no names mentioned sowed the seeds of suspicion in Kōvalaṉ's mind; he began to feel she had a secret lover other than himself. In dudgeon, he returns home, leaving Mātavi abruptly. Now Kaṇṇaki displaying a patience that is amazing-and even unnatural-mistakes his lack of cheer as due to his inability to take a worthwhile present to Mātavi; she therefore offers him her leg ornaments (the *cilampu* in Tamil, after which the whole work has been named). Kōvalaṉ, awake now as from a deep slumber to the realities, tells her lovingly that he was quite done with Mātavi and taking Kaṇṇaki with him he travels to Maturai to begin a new life. But it was not life but death that awaited him in the Pāṇṭiya capital. For a goldsmith working for the queen implicates Kōvalaṉ in the theft of the queen's own *cilampu* (the goldsmith it was who had stolen the jewel) and the Pāṇṭiya king orders Kōvalaṉ to be killed for the theft.

Kaṇṇaki learns of the terrible fate of her husband and roused to fury she walks to the king's presence demanding justice. The king tries to justify his action but the irate Kaṇṇaki throws down her remaining

cilampu in the royal court, proving beyond a doubt from the gemstones that shot out of it that what Kōvalan̲ had with him was not the stolen jewel of the queen which had pearls in it. The king falls down dead at this demonstration of the injustice he had dealt out, his queen follows suit and Kaṇṇaki extracts a terrible retribution by burning the city of Maturai with the fire of her chastity. She then repairs to the Cēra Kingdom where, after fasting for a few days she is met by her dead husband, now a resplendent resident of Heaven and taken there in a chariot.

The people of the area saw this glorious sight of Kaṇṇaki ascending to heaven and reported it to King Ceṅkuṭṭuvan̲ who desired to honour Kaṇṇaki as the goddess of chastity and proceeded at the head of an army to the Himalayas to bring sanctified stones for the proposed temple. His brother Iḷaṅkō who had taken orders just in order to enable Ceṅkuṭṭuvan̲ to ascend the throne decided to immortalise her story in an epic. He could have said truthfully with Shakespeare that

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme; (1)

For the temple the Cēra king built out of stones brought from the Himalayas has vanished and three States are laying claim to be the location of the vanished monument. But Iḷaṅkō's magnificent verse lives on, admired in the land of its birth, and recently, crossing the seas, is admired too in the lands of the west. Again to borrow from the bard of Avon, Kaṇṇaki's

praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom. (2)

Already we hear of temples in her honour in Sri Lanka and other South East Asian countries. Lots of common people in these countries (as in Tamil land) who have never heard of Iḷaṅkō, worship Kaṇṇaki as the model of womanhood. This itself constitutes the highest praise of

an author whose epic and its leading character live on in the minds of men though he himself might not be remembered always in connection with them.

What is the secret of the enduring popularity of this epic? We have seen briefly its titles to greatness but it is necessary to spend a little more time on the subject. Not only the greatness of the epic but the fact that it is the pioneering work that launched a whole lot of long poems in the same genre in the centuries that followed compels a somewhat detailed examination of Iḷankō 's work.

The first point the present writer would urge in this study is the extraordinary richness and variety of the experience the reader gets out of it. If a small poem from an early *Caṅkam* work captures for ever a glorious piece of experience, a circumscribed glimpse of a worthwhile moment, this poet, choosing a wide canvas proffers a richly satisfying community of experiences, adequate in depth and variety and range to last a lifetime of literary repletion. This Jain monk is at home in the company of crowned kings from his own native milieu; but he can be at home in the company of hunting hillfolk and dancing cow-herds and cowherdesses whose *patois* he can speak and comprehend. His epic is teeming with wealthy merchant princes, ardent lovers, the denizens of courtesans' quarters and itinerary nuns and lecherous men and truthful Brahmins; we hear in it high theology from ordained nuns and the simple talk of unsophisticated village girls. The reader is amazed at the depth and range of worldly experience of this Jain monk who was born a prince. How and where did he get the opportunity to observe hunters and shepherds at work and at play? All great literature is produced by the alchemy of the interaction between hoards of worldly experience stacked up in the poet's brain and his creative imagination. He should have been gifted with a fantastic creative imagination; but where did he get these hoards of experience from? Such questions in the case of creative artists shall always remain unanswered.

So, poet Iḷankō launched out for the first time in Tamil an epic that furnished a comprehensive literary experience in place of the momentary glimpse of an emotion-filled slice of life which the *Caṅkam* poets delighted to purvey. The second great quality of this epic (may be, we should have put it as the first) is that it was a pioneering work that presaged numberless works of this genre in the centuries that followed. A different type of poetic ability is called for in this exercise of writing an epic several thousands of lines long, than is needed for a short poem of 5 or 15 or 50 lines. At the physical level, a consistent flow of energy over months, perhaps over years is called for; an epic of these dimensions takes it out of you. At the emotional level, a consistent, unflagging interest in the project is called for, if one desires to undertake and complete a work of these dimensions. A habit of hard, sustained industry is necessary in the writer who plans to write anything as pretentious as a novel or an epic.

But these are requirements at a lower level. For the epic to be captivating, for a long work to capture and retain reader interest over the thousands of lines of verse, special ingredients are needed to be mixed and inspired cooking is called for. There should be a strong story line, the characters should command interest, the episodes must be realistic and uncontrived, the sentiment should be artistically portrayed without excess or bland underpainting and the style of presentation such as to appeal to the average reader. Many *Purāṇas* and *Talapurāṇas* do not possess any of these qualities but still they keep alive because of the predominant religious interest. A literary work like the *Cilappatikāram* will have to possess these qualities in abundant measure if it is to interest people of widely different religious denominations.

A detailed critical study of this great epic will be quite beyond the scope of this work. But perhaps some select passages can be presented in translation to help the reader who has not read the original to savour

its compelling quality.

One of the finest pieces in this great epic is the *kāṉalvari* sung by Kōvalaṉ and Mātavi when they were entertaining themselves with sea-bathing and musical intermissions. As the background is the sea shore, Mātavi sings appropriately in the *neytal* mode, recording the heart-ache of a girl of the fishermen tribe for her absent lover:

Lovely flowers! fulll of honey
Art thou dreaming that my lover
In this moonlight, soft and pleasant
Cometh back into my bower?
The birds have flown away to roost
The glowing sun has set;
But still I wait with streaming eyes
Where last my love I met. (3)

The Jain monk who can preach the transience of all created things through a high-minded nun Kaunti Aṭikaḷ has composed two of the most beautiful love letters in all literature. When Kōvalaṉ leaves Mātavi on a needless misunderstanding, she writes a letter to him with the bud of a flower as the pen and a viscous compound of kumkum and certain aromatic herbs as the ink and sends the epistle to Kōvalaṉ through her maid. This is how the letter goes:

Summer, the youthful prince of caprice
Brings together joyful couples
Amongst all things living. The high-born moon
Has risen, opening the buds of flowers
At gloaming. The season and the moon
So kind to lovers that keep together
Are harsh to the lonely, they are death to me.
The god who wields blossom-arrows
Tortures to death those bound by love

That languish alone; he visits death
On hapless women whose lovers leave
To journey far through wooded tracts
Unmindful of the agonies
The women at home are forced to suffer.
All this is not a rare happening,
It's not a myth; its harsh, its real
And you should learn that it can happen
To the one in anguish you have loved. (4)

When Kōvalan̲ and Kaṇṇaki leave the Cōḻa country and travel towards Maturai, they stay at a Kāḷi temple and witness the weird dance of the priestess accompanied by the piece called *Vettuvavari*. A fragment from this is given for the reader's enjoyment:

You are swathed in a tiger skin with the skin of a pachyderm
As upper garment and you stand on the dusky head of a buffalo
Worshipped by the devas! Goddess, you are the inner secret
Of the secret Scriptures, you constitute wisdom's concentrate!
You stand steady in the midst of all that flicker, prevaricate! (5)

One of the finest passages in the whole work (as was pointed out earlier) is where the Cēra King reacts in a highly subjective manner to the story of Kōvalan̲ and Kaṇṇaki narrated by Cāttan̲ār, the poet. Here, the king's reaction is furnished:

For kings like us it's far to be preferred
That we leave the world before winged words
Of acrimony reach our ears!
The Pāṇṭiya did not swerve from this
The guiding principle of the ruling class;
And his soul on leaving his body
Presto! straightened the royal sceptre
That had got bent through the agency

Of a malevolent destiny!
Kings tremble in vaulting fear
If the rains fail, if the subjects suffer
If things go amiss in a corner of the realm.
A King's is not a life of ease
When all the worries and ills of the people
Come crowding on and crush the king!
It's surely not the kind of life
That one longs for; a king does wear
A crown that's full of prickly thorns! (6)

We referred, earlier, to Iḷaṅkō 's great ability to portray emotion. The sorrow of Kaṇṇaki at her desertion by Kōvalan̲ is not directly described but we are allowed to see it and experience it through the words of her devoted parents-in-law. The dejection of Mātavi at the first signs of Kōvalan̲'s lack of interest in her and her overwhelming anguish when she learns he was through with her for good are beautifully portrayed. Kōvalan̲'s penitence for having betrayed Kaṇṇaki's love is shown in various acts of tenderness towards her during their long journey to Maturai. And finally Kaṇṇaki's vaulting rage that consumes Maturai after her tumultuous scene at the royal court comes out in fire-breathing words spaced together in a breathless sequence. Ultimately every great work of literature is judged great only if it portrays sentiment with art and without artifice. Iḷaṅkō passes with ease this acid test of greatness.

The one field where Iḷaṅkō does not score very impressively is character-portrayal. But here he shares a common disability with all epic poets. Their characters are all light or all darkness; they seem to be indicative of the high idealism of the authors, not their sense of realism. Kampan̲ is the only epic poet who had the singular ability to draw convincing character portraits. But yet there are strokes of genius even in this epic of Iḷaṅkō. The two principalwomen characters are both

idealised portraits. But the discerning reader will detect a major difference between them-and this difference must have been consciously painted in by the poet. Kaṇṇaki is cloyingly virtuous, she is more godly than a woman. Mātavi, on the other hand, is accomplished, bright and obviously quite interesting company. Kaṇṇaki is fit to be worshipped-and no husband will be comfortable with such a woman. There is a parallel in a later *purāṇam* (the *Periyapurāṇam*) where Puṉitavati who later gets to be known as Kāraikkālammaiyār, similarly of an angelic disposition makes her husband uncomfortable by her very qualities; and the husband leave her for good and marry another and settle down in a distant town. Kōvalaṉ is essentially a handsome dilettante, not a villain but a rich young man about town, with a romantic heart and a roving eye. He is not very interestingly portrayed; his importance in the emotional map is on account of the fierce, passionate love the two chief women characters bear to him-the kind of love that drives one to asceticism and the other to death. The other characters are very minor; the parents of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki do not get firmly portrayed, the Pāṇṭiya King and the Queen are again idealised portraits (at least in the manner of their death).

Iḷaṅkō, however, displays a wonderful insight into the deeper recesses of the human mind when he describes the quite different sentiments expressed by the Cēra King and his Queen and himself while reacting to the story of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki as recounted by Cāttaṉār, the poet. For the king, on hearing the story is struck forcibly by the fate of his own peer, the Pāṇṭiya King, who, dying, set right the rod of justice (a favourite Tamil metaphorical concept for the norms of justice) which had been bent by the quite undeserved punishment meted out to Kōvalaṉ. He laments on how uneasy lies the head that wears a crown, forgetting, for the moment, the terrible fate that fell to the lot of the principal characters. The queen chiefly commiserates with the misfortune of the Pāṇṭiya queen and Kaṇṇaki who had both lost their husbands under

most unhappy circumstances. The poet's reaction again is characteristically individual and different from these two, he sees the potential for a great epic in this tragedy and suggests that Cāttaṉār should compose it. Cāttaṉār declines and advises Iḷaṅkō to write it himself; and thus was the great epic born.

If characterization, with some brilliant exceptions as above, is not Iḷaṅkō's forte, descriptive narration and atmosphere painting decidedly are. Descriptions constitute the main difference from the viewpoint of length between short poems and long poems and between the latter and the epics. Epics are intended to be read at leisure, not in one sitting but many and the reader liked colourful scenes painted in them in good diction. Great poets made adroit use of them, to evoke the sentiment or stress a point or justify a reaction the better.

Iḷaṅkō begins his epic at a leisurely pace, taking his time to describe the marriage ritual that bound together the two principal characters. He then takes even more time to describe the training Mātavi received in the fine arts. The purpose is clearly to emphasise the two points at variance with each other which constitute the motive force of the whole story. The first is the fact that Kaṇṇaki has now been provided with an ideal and an objective that will dominate her personality for the rest of her life; she is the wife par excellence who achieves the fulness of her personality only on her marriage. The other is the superior attraction of Mātavi through her varied accomplishment in the arts which forced Kōvalaṉ to swerve from the narrow path of virtue, thus providing the basic motif of the story. The epic poet can use descriptions dexterously to emphasise the emotional background. As has been pointed out acutely by Dr. Mu. Varatarācaṉār in his History of Tamil Literature, the poet describes flowers and bees and the southern breeze at two points early in the epic; one is at the start of the married life of the principal characters and the second when Kōvalaṉ starts betraying his faith; the two descriptions of the same ingredients are so

composed as to eke out the prevailing sentiments of the passages.

The description of the long route from Pukār in the Cōḷa country to Maturai, the capital of the Pāṇṭiyas is extended to include the barren, rainless tracts that intervene, the lecherous passer-by and the shameless prostitute they come across (as if to bring home to Kōvalaṉ the futility of an immoral life), the moonlit night and the letter of Mātavi that gives expression to her deepest melancholy. All this has a certain reinforcing effect on the prevailing sentiments which are a medley of blissful joy felt by Kaṇṇaki at Kōvalaṉ returning to her and the depression in Kōvalaṉ in having come down in the world through his own misdeeds and at the physical suffering of his delicately nurtured wife. The philosophical counsel given by Kaunti Aṭikaḷ who escorts them during the journey and the fateful words of the *cāraṇar* at the start create an artistically proper atmosphere for the tragedy that ensues.

Another feature that is characteristic of the genre is the working in of what should be called folksongs into the very texture of the epic. Later poets were all shown the way by Iḷaṅkō whose pioneering efforts in this direction are yet to be excelled. The songs encompassing the *kāṉalvari*, the *'vēṭṭuvavari*, the cowherds dance music and the *kuṉrakkuravai* appear to have been inspired by the folksongs in vogue among various sections of the people; Iḷaṅkō took the concepts, and the spirit and perhaps even the metre and wove a wonderfully artistic pattern that gives off the characteristic flavour of the region and the class of people it represents. Above every other device, this creates the correct atmosphere of the epic genre in contradistinction to the small poem. These four songs can be taken out of the epic and enjoyed as separate entities in themselves; but, as part of the epic, they add the desired variety and picturesqueness of atmosphere and local colour to the great work enhancing its epic quality.

An epic poet must have a large vision, an epic owes its status not

merely to its great physical size but to a breadth of treatment and a wide range of experience portrayed and to a sweeping vision encompassing the whole of the human race. Iḷaṅkō deals with universal ethics through the rather thin story of a pair of lovers whom a ruthless fate ground down unheedingly in its eternal motion. True to life, the story of Kōvalan̲ and Kaṇṇaki does not have a central villain who plots tirelessly the doom of the principal characters till the last chapter, only to fall into the very pit he has dug for them. There is no such melodramatic villain in the epic, the goldsmith is a minor pawn in the hands of a malevolent fate. As in Greek tragedies, all the villainy is wrought by fate which works through man's weakness - and foibles, Iḷaṅkō has the range and the vision to encompass all this and the technical craftmanship to deliver it all without loss of emphasis. And seeing that he had no model in Tamil before him, we must give him the highest credit for launching a pioneering effort of such quality.

The Maṇimēkalai

We shall now study the *Maṇimēkalai'* the epic poem that is usually bracketed with the *Cilappatikāram.* The bracketing has arisen on account of two reasons: one is that they were written approximately in the same period of time, in the same generation, their authors being contemporaries; the second is that story wise, the *Maṇimēkalai* is a sequel to the *Cilappatikāram*, dealing with the happenings in the life of Maṇimēkalai, the daughter of Kōvalan̲ and Mātavi. In literary quality however they are wide apart.

The story can be very involved, with a great deal of miraculous happenings and accounts of previous births and Buddhist teachings. It can however be simply told, for the benefit of the many who do not intend to read the epic. Maṇimēkalai, a beautiful girl, the daughter of Mātavi grows up in a Buddhist abbey in Pukār. One evening she goes to gather flowers from a special garden called the *Uvavan̲am* meets with her maid where she meets the prince of the Cōḻa line, Utayakumaran̲

who falls passionately in love with her, she herself being much affected by him. But, she is afraid of such attachments and is eager to become a nun. A goddess after whom she herself has been named takes her away from the garden, unseen by any mortals and places her in an island called Maṇipallavam. Here she learns that the prince Utayakumaraṉ was her husband in her former birth; and on the goddess' advice she secures a magic vessel called the *Amutacurapi'* left there by a person called Āputtiraṉ. The magic vessel had the wonderful quality of feeding numberless people without the contents getting exhausted.

The goddess takes her back to Pukār after seven days. She meets the monk of the town who tells her the story of Āputtiraṉ. Born out of wedlock he developed into an extremely compassionate person who was persecuted for his opposition to an animal sacrifice. During his wanderings he acquires the miraculous *Amutacurapi* to feed some starving beggars and getting left behind by the vessel by which he was travelling to Cāvakam he threw the magic vessel into a tank to be picked up by Maṇimēkalai later. He died there and was born in Cāvakam and adopted by the king; he grew up and succeeded to the throne of Cāvakam.

On the monk's advice Maṇimēkalai begins her work of social service by feeding the hungry. The first person who receives food from her is Kāyacaṇṭikai who suffered from a disease which caused insatiable craving for food; she is cured of the disease the instant the food from the magical vessel was consumed. During the course of her feeding service, she supplies food to prisoners and the warders report the magic happening to the king. The king sends for her and grants her requests that the prisoners be set free and the prison house itself should be converted into a public charity hall.

In the meantime the tireless lover Utayakumaraṉ having found out that the girl he is after is in Pukār in the public charity hall pays ardent address to her. This is repulsed gently by Maṇimēkalai who is all

the time afraid that her love for him might come out of her, in her unguarded moment. She then assumes the form of Kāyacaṇṭikai, her first beneficiary, to escape the unwelcome attentions of the prince.

However more trouble arises on account of this as Kāyacaṇṭikai's husband arrives on the scene and is struck by jealously at the prince paying court to his wife. He continues his surveillance into the dark hours of the night; and sure enough the prince turns up in the night to continue the good work and gets killed at the hands of the jealous husband. One of the images in the temple reveals the truth to him and he leaves the place totally unhappy at his needless crime. Maṇimēkalai also hears the account from the image which tells her what is going to happen to her.

Things happen as foretold. Maṇimēkalai is arrested for the murder of the prince but is released and handed over to the queen who wants to take vengeance on the girl and begins to torture her. But she withstands all this owing to her magical powers and when the repentant queen releases her, she flies to Cāvakam and meets Āputtiraṉ, now king of the place and shows him the island Maṇipallavam where he threw the magic vessel in a tank and starved to death. She dissuades him from abdicating the throne pointing out that he can do more good to the people by continuing to rule them wisely and that doing good is the highest religion.

Maṇimēkalai leaves the king and flies back to the mainland where in the garb of a monk she learns about all the other religions at Vañci and worships at the temple of Kaṇṇaki and returns to Kāñci to feed the people as a famine was raging there. She sits at the feet of a venerable abbot and learns the tenets of Buddhism; she then enters the order of nuns in a colourful ceremony.

The epic poem is done in the *Akaval* metre adopted by Iḷaṅkō and the author, Cāttaṉār shows considerable proficiency in handling it. The

diction used is similar to Iḷaṅkō's but the same words are found used with a different emphasis to create a very different effect. While Iḷaṅkō uses only the simile and metaphor and the device of latent metaphor much fancied by the *Caṅkam* poets in evoking the correct atmosphere, Cāttaṉār brings into use the double entendre and verbal tricks which became the raging fashion in later epochs.

Cāttaṉār is an extremely sincere Buddhist and is most earnest about evangelization of the new faith. His frank and avowed purpose in writing this epic was to spread the gospel of Buddhism among the Tamils. Even a cursory student of the work will find the characters preaching to each other the dogmas of the faith; he would find that even the maid who accompanies Maṇimēkalai to the garden mouths the basic teachings of Buddhism. Every occasion is pressed into service to yield a religious essence. The storyline is loose and seems, on purpose to have been kept that way in order that homilies may dominate over incidents.

One of the dominant features of the epic is the constant flashback into the narration of the events of the previous birth of the character involved. We see something of this in the *Cilappatikāram* but *Maṇimēkalai* bristles with this phenomenon. A sure-fire effect of this is to make everything mechanical as everything is pre-ordained and freewill has little play in men's affairs. This naturally takes away much of the interest the epic may have built up through other devices.

A second feature is the extraordinary use made of supernatural powers in the epic. Goddesses appear and leave flying through the air; Maṇimēkalai herself starts doing this before the end of the epic. She learns magic spells by which she can bear torture and go foodless for days without number. Her magic vessel occupies a prominent position in the epic. Gods are terribly short-tempered; for one of them would destroy a city for its failure to celebrate the festival due to the god. Images harangus people presaging coming events. All this takes away

from the realism of the epic.

A dominant feature of the work is the poet's way of painting in lofty passages of elevated thought at many points in the epic. The ideal of service to mankind as the fittest kinds of worship has nowhere else been emphasised as strongly as here. Maṇimēkalai's counsel to Āputtiraṉ is very wise and practical; seeing that he desires to abdicate his throne and get ordained as a monk she remonstrates with him, pointing out the great work he has done as king for the welfare of his subjects and clinching the issue with the words.

If kings forsake their bounden duty
Of protecting the people, to assume monk-hood,
Which agency can remove the thorns
That afflict the people, but the king?
O king anointed! What merits you can
Acquire by entering a monastery
You can gather by ruling well.
For the greatest good is providing food
And raiment and shelter to those in need.
As a king you have been doing this
So, remain on the throne!And great shall be
The hoard of merit you shall gather ! (7)

But elsewhere the words of philosophical wisdom are found shot through with a strong dose of pessimism which is a characteristic of the two protestant religions Jainism and Buddhism and which the Hindu Purāṇas imbibed perhaps from them, a far cry from the joyous acceptance of life we see in the early *Caṅkam* works.

But the most cardinal defect of the work, judged purely as literature, is the absence of a viable central sentiment. Literary thinkers are all agreed that a central sentiment is as necessary to a creative work of

literature as the central circus pole to keep the structure aloft. They also are mostly agreed that the best sentiment for a literary work should be love between man and woman, though, in a long epic other sentiments can be painted in to perform auxiliary service. In this epic, we come across the extraordinary phenomenon of a sweet girl, richly endowed by nature with all feminine graces, who can feel the pull of love too, who resolutely chokes off the sentiment at source so that she might renounce material life and become a nun. Her mother, disappointed in love may have had an excellent reason to seek to get ordained and the reader finds himself in deep sympathy with her. He would find it difficult to feel that way with her daughter who runs away from life before she knows anything of life, before experiencing it in any manner. So she rejects the advances of Utayakumaraṉ who gets slain in the hours of the night under the spur of a mistake, half way through the epic. And the epic ends with Maṇimēkalai getting ordained ceremoniously as a Buddhist nun. The absence of any central sentiment acceptable in aesthetics must rank as the biggest argument against classifying Maṇimēkalai as a work of creative literature, whatever high the value it has as a scripture of the Tamil Buddhistic canon.

The Cintāmaṇi

Let us now undertake a study of the *Cintāmaṇi*, chronologically the last of the three epics now available out of the five classified as the chief epics. The long poem was composed by a Jain monk Tiruttakka Tēvar who is believed by tradition to have undertaken to compose this love-dominated romance as a challenge in reply to the opprobrium that Jains could not sing about love. Tēvar vindicated himself with such thoroughness that his hero marries not once but eight times and the work itself has come to be known as the 'work of weddings' *(Maṇaṉūl)*. The epic structure had been well established by the time Tēvar came to compose his work ; but the major innovation made in this genre by him

was the universal use of the *viruttam* as the metre for the work, ringing changes in the length of the lines and of quantity of the syllables with such effect that all future poets were led to adopt this facile and variegated metre for all their works. Though Kampan̲ handled this class of metres with greater facility, even he was indebted to this great pioneer in this important aspect.

The plot is extremely thin and easily told. Caccantan̲, king of Emāṅkata country had entrusted the duties of kingship to his minister Kaṭṭiyaṅkāran̲ so that he might enjoy conjugal bliss with Vicayai his queen. She becomes pregnant but before she could deliver, the minister betrays his king's trust, takes up arms and kills the king, assuming the reins of government as a permanent measure now, on his own right. Fortunately the pregnant queen had been sent out of the palace in a supernatural vehicle and she delivers Cīvakan̲ in a burning ghat. Fortunately the child is adopted by a good couple who bring him up with all affection in the same capital town where the villain was ruling in place of the king he had so basely deceived and slain.

After this, we have a series of totally separate episodes through which Cīvakan̲ comes out triumphant, acquiring eight wives as the trophies of the encounters. We can select two interesting examples out of these as samples.

One is where he weds a *Vityātara* girl called Kāntarvatattai. This girl, of surpassing beauty and a wonderful virtuosity in playing on the lute is entrusted by her father to the care of a merchant prince with the injunction to get her married off to a suitor who defeats her in a tourney of lute playing. Many are the aspirants attracted to her by her beauty and talents but none of them is able to defeat her in musical contest.

Cīvakan̲ appears on the scene now and expresses his desire to compete for the fair hand of Tattai. Lutes are brought to him only to be rejected, one by one for some fault or other. He then sends for his brother's lute, tunes it and starts playing.Tattai had already fallen in

love with him at first sight. Saying to herself, "You have entered the protected convent of my heart by opening the door of my virginity; and you have bound my heart up inextricably, it is true. But just wait, my young man!I shall bind you to me even faster with my wedding garland!" she begins to sing. But much to her delight and surprise, she found herself vanquished in singing and lute-strumming; and, grateful for the defeat at the hands of so talented and handsome a youth, she places the wedding garland on his neck.

But the villain who had slain Cīvakaṉ's father and assumed kingship over the realm sets up the other contenders who were crown princes of different kingdoms. They go to war against Cīvakaṉ and get trounced at his hands and flee the field. Cīvakaṉ carries off Kāntarvatattai as the trophy of the war.

During the course of his adventures Cīvakaṉ reaches a country where he attends a party in the house of a merchant. His daughter Kēmacari, a paragon of beauty had a supernatural talent (or disability) foretold at birth by astrologers that to her eyes all males, except the one destined to marry her, eventually, will appear as females. Her father, on her attaining the age of marriage, started the custom of taking home all eligible young men who came to his shop to be exposed to the view of his daughter. She did not register bashfulness at any one of them, on account of the fact she did not see them as males at all. So all eligible men were getting rejected and the hapless father was getting distinctly worried when along came Cīvakaṉ before whom Kēmacari manifested bashfulness to an extraordinary degree. The father was transported with joy and as Cīvakaṉ was a very willing party, he gave his daughter in marriage to the young man.

The final adventure described is where he marries Ilakkaṇai after winning a contest where the villain of the epic with all his children and kinsmen are badly defeated and killed in a subsequent battle by the victor. Cīvakaṉ gets back his father's kingdom and spends many happy

years in worldly happiness with all his eight wives. Then geetting tired of sensory delights and in accordance with the highest Jain dharma, he gets ordained as a monk on the urging of two Cāraṇars and begins the last part of his life as a wandering ascetic teaching Jain dogmas to all seekers.

The story is believed to be based on some accounts in north Indian Jain works; it is also possible that Tēvar took the elements of the story from the many accounts current in the oral tradition of the time. From the names of the characters and the structure of the episodes, one is led to believe very strongly in a north Indian origin for the story. Whatever the source, Tēvar breathed high creativity into the outline and produced a great work of literary art. The epic has two defects which would have destroyed a lesser work. They are its very loose episodial structure rather like the Odyssey of the Greeks and the religious element that seems to be among the priorities with the author. But the former defect rather suits an epic structure viewed from the Indian view point and the way the poet handles the episodes persuades the reader to believe he is reading a continuous, homogeneous work. Tēvar takes care not to allow the religious element to domineer till the very last *ilampakam* or canto where it is all Jain precepts and sin and salvation. A defect Tēvar suffers from in common with all epic poets is his lack of interest in realistic characterization. It is all light and shade effects with him, there is no middle chrome. Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṉ is an unmitigated villain, with nothing to commend him. Cīvakaṉ is all virtue, handsome beyond all human limits and blessed with outstanding ability in all the arts not excluding the art of war. The girls in the epic are all the last word in feminine beauty, accomplishments and feminine virtues. There is also the supernatural element, never taking command, as in Maṇimēkalai but never quite absent; this is however, not allowed to destroy the little enough realism which one can expect to find in Indian epic poetry.

When we have catalogued the shortcomings, we find they are not serious enough to rob the work of its perennial charm. Its appeal over a millennium has been undiminished. The merits of the work are easy enough to enumerate. Tēvar had a mastery of Tamil diction and had obviously acquired an enviable manipulative skill over the new fanged family of *viruttam* metres. His powers of description are so great he is able to bring before the eyes of the reader the scene in the early part of the epic where the queen gives birth to Cīvakaṉ in the backdrop of a burial ground; equally well does he portray the many scenes of wedding and of battle. With a photographic eye for the right detail, the poet can make the reader see everything vividly with the aid of both the sound and the sense of his happily chosen words.

Tēvar seems to have acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of many branches of learning though he was an ordained monk. He can handle Tattai's lute-strumming contest as well as the archery test for the wedding of Ilakkaṇai with a fine sense of artistic detail that flows from a competence in these widely divergent fields. Though he knows the ways of the poor, he is intimate with the life-styles of merchants and kings.

Tēvar, though a monk is essentially a poet of effervescent joy, a portrayer of happy, smiling faces. This must be the secret of his abiding charm; this must be the agency that conceals the not very widely understood fact that Tēvar rarely plumbs the depths of human experience. He is the happy weaver of pleasantly coloured fabrics while Iḷaṅkō is the seer with a distant, broad vision.

To enable the reader to see for himself the art of the great poet, it would be necessary to provide translations of hundreds of stanzas from the epic which will be quite beyond the scope of this work. So the present writer shall content himself with only three specimens of Tēvar's exquisite poetry. One is taken from the first *ilampakam* where, as custom requires, he describes the capital city of Caccantaṉ, father of

Civakan̲. This particular stanza portrays the happy love-life of the citizens who find total fulfilment in conjugal bliss:

In nightly union, the handsome-eyed
Plough with the aid of their protruding breasts
The slushy field of their husband's chests
Oozing rich with the paste of sandal
And garner all that their hearts desire. (8)

The second stanza, describing Civakan̲'s personality and attainments is taken from the second canto:

Possessed of skill
Over the range of arts
(With playing on the lute
The chiefest of them)
Handsome to behold,
Trained in archery
With the chest like a mountain
He shone forth, with none
To rival his glory
In all the world. (9)

The third piece presented is from the third canto, perhaps the most interesting of them all; here, Kāntarvatattai the surpassingly beautiful semi-celestial maiden, the despair of suitors, finds herself falling madly in love with Civakan̲ and addresses him, sotto voce:

You may be a god, you may be a mortal;
But you had the power, the temerity
To yank open the door of my virginity
And entering the protected portals of my heart
You fastened it up; but just you wait!

You will yet see me binding you up
Tighter far with my wedding garland! (10)

It is not clear when and how the concept of five great epics arose in the Tamil land. As the influence of Sanskrit spread and its prestige grew in this area, it must have become the fashion to apply all the possible criteria, classification and nomenclature prevalent in Sanskrit to the Tamil field, irrespective of whether they could be applied naturally and were relevant and useful in the new situation. After Magha composed the Sisupalavadham and Sriharsa, the Naisadham in Sanskrit in the 9th or the 10th cent. A.D., the convention of the five great epics arose in the north; it is possible, therefore, that after the 9th cent. the concept began to be applied to Tamil, too, on the basis of some surface resemblances and factors of lesser significance.

For, though the *Cilappatikāram* and the *Cintāmaṇi* are of the highest literary quality fit to be classified as great epics, the *Maṇimēkalai*, as we have seen is decidedly not. Even if we borrow the Sanskrit classification of man's fourfold purpose in life, the *Aṟam*, *Poruḷ*, *Iṉpam* and *Vīṭu* and apply the criterion whether all of them are dealt with in a proper and fitting manner to see if they qualify for the epithet of great epics, *Iṉpam* (pleasure or delight) is conspicuously absent in *Maṇimēkalai*. One would rank pleasure as an ingredient of more than average importance in a work of literature. Hence, the ranking of this work among the five great epics does not represent mature literary judgment and seems to be of questionable value.

There are two other works *Vaḷaiyāpati* and *Kuṇṭalakēci* which together with the three named above, constitute, in the eyes of this late tradition, the five great epics. Of the two, the *Vaḷaiyāpati* has been totally lost to us and hence no value - or class-judgment can be passed on that. The *Kuṇṭalakēci* is available to us in fragments and an

important commentator classifies it as a work of religious polemics. It is also known that the Jain work *Nīlakēci* arose as a polemical retort to this work of the Buddhists. It is therefore abundantly clear that the *Kuṇṭalakēci* could be bracketed along with the *Maṇimēkalai* as a work of predominantly religious importance with little claim to be counted as high literature.

The concept of the five great epics naturally led to the corresponding one of the five lesser epics, when smaller (in size) and later (in time) works arose with roughly the same characteristics and all of them owing their being to Jain or Buddhist impulse to proselytization. The works included in this categorization are: the *Cūḷāmaṇi*, the *Nīlakēci*, the *Nākakumāra Kāppiyam*, the *Yacōtara Kāppiyam* and the *Utayaṇakumāra Kāppiyam*. It is important to note that for reasons totally unknown, a valuable Jain literary work of this period, the *Peruṅkatai* has not been classified into either of these two groups. It is one of the many vagaries which outrightly condemns this highly artificial categorizing exercise in Tamil.

Two worthy works

The waywardness of the judgment stands out more vividly when we realise that the *Utayaṇakumārakāppiy am*, included in the privileged five covers roughly the same ground as the *Peruṅkatai*. We shall consider in brief detail the two worthwhile works, the *Cūḷāmaṇi* and the *Peruṅkatai* and dismiss the rest of them with a capsulated brevity.

Cūḷāmaṇi has a very typical purāṇic flavour; in fact its story line runs similar to the story of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavata *purāṇam*. The hero Tiviṭṭaṉ is often compared to the highest gods and possesses almost supernatural powers. He performs wonderful feats of bravery like slaying lions single-handed. The king of the semi-divine Vidyataras is much impressed with him and gives his daughter in marriage to him.

The epic pursues his singularly bright life of personal fulfilment and unparalleled career of a king loved by all his subjects; his father the old king Payāpati now in his old age, in accord with the well-established Jain pattern, renounces material life and gets ordained as a Jain, monk. And the work ends in a flurry of moral teachings and theological dissertation.

The work is notable pre-eminently for its melodious poetry. The author, Tōlāmoḻit Tēvar uses the *viruttam* as Tiruttakka Tēvar did but in the smoothness and facility of manipulation, the author of *Cūḷāmaṇi* often steals a march over his more famous predecessor. *Cūḷāmaṇi* is recommended warmly to all lovers of good Tamil for its sweet diction and flowing verse.

Tōlāmoḻit Tēvar is a good portrait painter and has a verve for narration. He is a zealous Jain and uses all occasions to preach Jain teachings-but as an artist he knows how to keep this under control. His story involving semi-divine characters and astrological predictions and supernatural events does not lend itself to any element of life-like realism; his characterization also suffers for these reasons. There is some sublimity and elevation of thought in the work and the message is the triumph of good over evil. But there is little of striking thought or original conceptualization in the entire work. And *Cūḷāmaṇi* will be read, not for its message but for its captivating poetry and for its colourfully vivid descriptions. And because of these same reasons, no attempt will be made to translate some passages from it as this poet suffers badly in translation.

Peruṅkatai is a work of considerable literary quality composed during this epic era by a Jain whose name has not been mentioned anywhere but who is universally known as Koṅku Vēḷir. The poet seems to have flourished in the 7th or 8th cent. A.D. in what is Periyār district

today, a minor king of resources and considerable influence in the Jain world. It is stated that his capital town Vicayamaṅ kalam had a great Jain temple which he lovingly endowed with money, presents and attention and which became an important centre of Jain pilgrimage. The broken-down edifice of today bears testimony to the glory of the place of worship during the hey-day of south Indian Jainism.

The immediate source of the story of this epic seems to have been the Sanskrit/Prakrit work by a Ganga king Durvinītan̲ who has been ascribed to the end of the 6th cent. A.D. This royal author was a Jain and he must have himself converted a widely prevalent Hindu story into a Jain chronicle or drawn upon a Jain tradition that had absorbed this Hindu story. For the story of Utayaṇan̲ is part of the folklore of Malwa and Kalidasa remarks that the village elders of the country are full of episodes featuring the romantic hero. One Gunadhya is reputed to have written the story of his adventures in the "Paisachi script"; this has been lost. But this work inspired one Sōmadēva to compose a long work called the Kathasarit sagara which became the source for many romances in Sanskrit and other Indian languages.

King Utayaṇan̲ of the Vatsas was the arche-type of a romantic hero, irresistably attractive to women, highly accomplished in all the fine arts, valorous at war and a sympathetic ruler who, however, preferred to spend his time neither fighting nor administering but in the harem with his many, lovely wives. His tale is pleasant to listen to and men and women for centuries have been regaling each other with episodes from this romantic beau's life. But mere records of romantic adventures are bound to pall on the listener after some time; hence, with its native gift for story-telling, the Hindu mind has built up around this kernel, quite a little hoard of mishaps, minor tragedies, misfortunes in the shape of loss of kingdom and loss of the beloved all of which get resolved at the end through the indefatigable labours of a gifted pair of ministers, with a little occasional help from the king. A

feature of this epic poem is that it has been composed entirely in the *akaval* metre of the *Cań kam* era and not in the *viruttam* of Tiruttakka Tēvar.

There are, besides the selection of the metre and the poet's high manipulative skill in employing it, several important other features too commending the work to greater recognition from the dilettante than has been vouchsafed to it. For one thing, Końku Vēḷir has had the artistic sensibility to recognise the tremendous potentiality of the *Cańkam* conventions which he has harnessed to excellent purpose in the work. While Tēvar and Kampa<u>n</u> and every great poet of later days have applied *Cańkam* concepts in their works, none of them has extracted such a large amount of poetic effect as Końku Vēḷir. The *Cańkam* literary conventions are peculiarly, uniquely the local product; they have grown up from the soil and been nourished on Tamil beliefs and aspirations and sensibilities; and, as a consequence, they sound true and native and apposite when harnessed to creative poetry. So, even though the story is from outside the Tamil land and the names are all exotic, this poem reads very much more as an authentic native product, breathing the pure, free air of the Tamil land.

Another of his merits is his considerable descriptive power for the display of which this epic genre furnishes the fullest scope. He has the eye of discernment and the ability to select the most worthwhile details; and with his enviable command of the Tamil language and his mastery over the flexible and tractable metre, he comes out with memorable verbal portraits of the variegated landscapes, the flora and the fauna and the people and their customs and preoccupations. Being a (minor) king himself, he knows to the last detail everything that goes on in the palaces and how crowned heads conduct their affairs; royal marriages and coronations are described with vivid fidelity. For epic richness there are few works to compare with the *Peruńkatai*.

The poet, KoṅkuVēḷir was a Jain and presumably an earnest member of the sect. He does not desist from expatiating on Jain doctrine now and then, either. But, being essentially a poet, he realises that too much of theology or moralisation will be a damper and restrains himself in this respect, earning the gratitude of his readers. For the times were such that religious dissertation in a literary work was the hallmark of excellence and ensured for it an immortality it does not otherwise deserve. The *Kuṇṭalakēci* and the *Nīlakēci* are excellent examples of the other type where the religious motif became the most dominant element to the suppression of all else. It is to the high credit of KoṅkuVēḷir that he resisted the tendency of the times and maintained a balance and a sense of proportion in composing the work.

Many other works were composed during this long period of seven centuries but few of them had any literary merit in them; the urge behind their composition seems to have been solely the zeal to proselytize the Jain or the Buddhist religion. Besides the *Nīlakēci* and the *Kuṇṭalakēci*, several other works were written with the title ending in *Kēci* like the *Piṅkalakēci* which merely deteriorated into dull polemical tomes. Then we have a class of works calling themselves frankly Purāṇās - like the *Cāntipurāṇam* and the *Mērumantara Purāṇam*, written with the avowed object of spreading religious concepts among the people. These can have little claim for a formal discussion in a book devoted to the examination of literary genres; a brief note on them, is however, included in the chapter on Purāṇās.

Taṇṭi's work on grammar

Before we conclude this chapter on epic poems a significant work (classified under grammar in Tamil) must be discussed in some detail as it has very much to do with this genre. The work is known as *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*. The date of its composition is quite uncertain but, as

it derives largely from the Sanskrit work Kavyadarsa by Dandi and that is ascribed to the 7th cent. A. D. this Tamil work must belong to a period later than the 7th cent. It is a matter of surprise and puzzlement that a Tamil work which owes a great deal to a Sanskirt work should be ascribed to an author with the same name; it is too much of a coincidence that the Tamil author also happened to have the same name as the Sanskirt writer. While the Tamil work is not a translation of the Sanskirt, it derives its matter almost wholly from the earlier work providing Tamil equivalents. That the Tamil author was a scholar in Tamil is, however, quite evident and the influence of his book over later-day literature was overwhelming.

Taṇti divides all literature into four major categories. The first is the individual and distinct short verse, the type seen in the early *Caṅkam* works. The second is merely an extension of this, a number of such short verses or (more likely) stanzas, making up a unit. The third category is the anthology encompassing a number of short verses of stanzas sung by different poets in different occasions strewn together on some basis. The basis can be the size and contents of the poems forming the collection like *Kuṟuntokai* where selected short poems on the theme of *Akam* are compiled. The basis can be the metre (and again the nature of the contents) as in *Kalittokai*. The common subject matter can be the basis as in *Puṟanāṉūṟu*.

The fourth category is called 'the continuous poem'; it is subdivided into two on the basis of continuity of the subject matter and the words. The second is merely the *Antāti*, based on the mechanical repetition of the last words of a stanza at the beginning of the next verse and is of an altogether lesser importance than the first. The category involving a continuous treatment of the same subject matter is what is of overwhelming importance to us, as this encompasses the epic poem.

After naming the category, Taṇṭi proceeds to lay down the conditions it should fulfil; these relate to the contents of the work, its purpose, style, arrangement and physical structure and range of matters dealt with. Taṇṭi 's list has been derived entirely from the Sanskrit Kavyadarsa, down to the last detail and makes no attempt to fit it into the native Tamil framework.

Tanti insists on the four objectives of man (the four Purusharthas of the Sanskritists) forming the main motif of an epic. In fact, if a work is deficient in one of them, it gets classified into a sub-category called "minor epic". The four objectives spoken of are *Aṟam*, (the moral law), *Poruḷ*, (material things), *Iṉpam* (pleasure) and *Vitu* (final emancipation). This is the steel under-frame on which the whole categorization depends.

The rest of the stipulations are by way of detail. How the work should begin is prescribed; there should be words of blessing, prayers and a reference by statement or implication to the subject-matter of the work. The next stipulation concerns the hero who should be a peerless leader of men. The work should contain within it a wide range of human experience, of activities and events like weddings, coronations, sallies into gardens and parks, water-games, drinking bouts, the birth of children, the separation and the reunion of lovers; there should be passages in it dealing with the king consulting his ministers on some issues of importance, the fitting out of a messenger, invasions and battles and celebrations of martial triumph; there should be descriptions of the sun rising and setting, of the revolving seasons, and of the country and the capital town of the hero and of mountains and oceans. The work should be divided into cantos and other sub-divisions and tastefully composed in a graceful style with all the eight sentiments delineated.

The first impression that the reader is likely to have on reading

this is that the grammarian has designed these instructions so as to secure for the epic a large and comprehensive frame-work, large, not only in size but in the range covered. The Tamil epic, according to Taṇṭi should be painted on as large a canvas as possible. Perhaps he intended that the reader should get a wide range of literary experience from the epic. While this may have a certain value, the stress on the width has unfortunately fallen too heavily for any subsequent poet to miss it. The result is a number of compositions with mainly this width and range and size to recommend them; they miss fulfilling the more important aesthetic requirement of an organic, homogeneous structure which relates all the parts into a meaningful whole. That this vital point has been altogether missed by the writers on aesthetics as well as by the poets (with some glorious exceptions among the latter) is a sign of the extent of deterioration in the aesthetic sense of the society.

The provision that all the eight sentiments should be nourished is particularly unfortunate, if it has been intended as we interpret it; the original sutra does not specifically lay down that all of them should be delineated in every work; this emphasis that all of them should be there has been given only in the commentary. The idea of the homogeneity of a literary work presupposes the idea of a single sentiment dominating it, augmented by other sentiments not opposed to it. In Sanskrit aesthetics, this idea of the unity of sentiment has been associated very much with the plays and not with the epics. One reason for this certainly is the fact that a play is seen in a single sitting and a multiple sentiment may create emotional eddying. It still does not relieve an epic writer from the responsibility of securing an essential unity of sentiment which must be accepted as the fundamental condition of all artistic effort. Sanskrit epic poets have dismally failed to secure this and it is no wonder that Tamil epic-writers for whom they served as a model ignored this point altogether.

But the most damaging provision, the one with the highest warping potential is that the four objectives of man should form the basic motif of an epic poem. For, with this kind of stipulation, the epic poem gets voted clean out of the family of literature, it ceases to be a creative work of art. Any piece of art is intended to purvey pleasure; that is the sole (not the main) end of all art. If it tells you something of geography, yoga or mensuration, that is a mere bye-product, it is incidental, it is not one that justifies the work. A work of art is justified purely by the pleasure it occasions to the dilettante, let there be no mistake about it. A section of the Sanskritists was clear about this, as witness Dhananjaya asserting it in the very first verse of his Dasarupaka as a fundamental axiom. The *Caṅkam* Tamils believed in it as an article of faith. This secure conviction indicating an aesthetically mature society got watered down badly after the *Caṅkam* era came to a close. With the traditions of Sanskrit clashing against the weakened conventions of Tamil, a great eddying ensued during which the society almost totally lost its basic aesthetic convictions. Otherwise it is difficult to explain how a grammarian could insist on dharma and materialist concepts being made objectives as fundamental as pleasure, in a work of art. Once this is accepted, there could have been no difficulty in including *Maṇimēkalai*, *Kuṇṭalakēci* and *Nīlakēci* as epic poems forming part of the literary corpus of the era.

Four thousand years and more of human experience have demonstrated clearly that objectives in any field get diluted, downgraded and dulled in course of time. This is on account of various factors, the chief among them being the progressively reduced tenacity with which these objectives are held by the agencies in the field. The initial fervour can seldom be continued in tension over decades. In the Tamil literary world we saw how the uniquely high objectives of the *Caṅkam* era got watered down till only their shadow was left when the powerful waves

from the north began to lash against them. But the new literary objectives crystallised in Taṇṭi's grammar started wrong with a most unfortunate stress on non-literary values; hence, it is not surprising that the literary vision of the Tamils got worse with time and the basic criteria for judging good literature got badly mixed up, warped and twisted out of shape. While Taṇṭi cannot be accused of initiating the trend which had been set by the epic poets of the Jain and Buddhist schools, perhaps three to four centuries earlier, he gave a clear definitive shape to the trend, a local habitation and a name; and with the prestige always enjoyed by grammarians in India, he set the sights for all the poets coming after him, ushering in a thousand years of literary mediocrity. That a Kampaṉ could appear on such a scene and write his immortal work was only a freak. Genius of those dimensions conforms to no generalisations, it ploughs a lonely furrow. And Kampaṉ is assuredly not a product of the Taṇṭi movement, he flourished in spite of it, he rode against the current to paint the skies in deathless colours.

Chapter Four

HYMNAL LITERATURE

The factors that gave rise to hymnal literature

The next significant genre that should be considered in detail is the devotional hymn, sung in units of ten called the *Patikam.* The advent of this genre at the time it happened is full of interest and would bear some analysis. For several factors should have been at work rendering the birth of this mode of composition possible and necessary. Some of them are historical, some religious and some psychological. It would be both beneficial and interesting to trace and assess these factors that led to the birth of hymnal literature.

Out of these factors, some were positive; for instance, the Pallava and Cōḻa kings encouraged Hinduism and built temples for Hindu gods. There was a Hindu wave rising all over the country, with the Guptas ruling in the North giving a powerful urge to a Hindu revival. But, again, there were forces of the nature of a powerful reaction against certain ruling tendencies which helped the advent of a Hindu 'Bhakti' movement in the south. One of them was the growing revolution against the wide-spread pessimism and the shutting out of all sensory enjoyment advocated by the fanatical elements in the Jain and Buddhist sects. The *Caṅkam* society considered that it was perfectly moral and desirable that man enjoyed the pleasures of the senses without transgression of the moral order; men could and should be naturally happy and this state of happiness need not be allowed to be warped by ever-present feelings of guilt and sin and fear of the torments of hell under the impression that these correctives are essential for a virtuous life. This happy mental attitude had mostly disappeared under the continuing impact of

pessimistic beliefs but its last vestiges that still persevered in the hearts of men were constantly in revolt against this negativism.

This pessimism and this turning the face away from pleasure are part of the mental frame-work that went with these sects at their best. But after a thousand years of their advent they were at no where near their best; in fact there had been a steady deterioration in the fine moral fervor and the ideological zeal which ushered in these protestant faiths. They had found royal favour and this hastened their inner decay. A parodical account of the Buddhism of the 7th century is available in Makēntiravarma Pallava's *Mattavilā ca Prakacana;* though it is by a highly critical Hindu writer, and hence should be accepted with reservations, other evidence confirms the extent of the fall from moral and other values of the Buddhists clergy at the end of the first millennium of Gautama Buddha. The condition of the Jain protagonists was no better as is vouchsafed by numerous accounts of contemporaries. The common people reacted to the sad fall from higher values of these men and women whose practice was so far away from their lofty precepts, by seeking the best in their old religion, by going back to the old faith of their forefathers. But the annals of man disclose that the old is never revived as it was; even in the process of revival, a renewal takes place and the old is reborn with subtle differences in the emphasis and the attitudes going with it.

But it should not be hastily assumed that it was only against these non-Hindu faiths that the people reacted. The more important and far more wide-spread reaction that was gaining the dimensions of a groundswell was against certain beliefs, attitudes, practices and methods of worship within the Hindu faith itself. For the inspiration and the spiritual stimulation of the Vedic Age had run dry centuries earlier and they had been replaced by an obscurantism and an insistence on rigid conformity with the established beliefs and

practices of an era long past. Offerings were being made, not only to the Vedic gods and goddesses but to the soma juice and even to the stones used to crush the soma creeper and the ladle used in the sacrifice to pour the juice! Dead ritual commanded unquestioning compliance and men of thought and an independent spirit had begun to rebel against it. The rebels could pursue the path of enquiry which was far beyond the calibre of the common man. The Vedic gods had largely been superseded by Siva and Tirumāl and Murukan and Vedic ceremonial ceased to command the interest of the common man. In any case, a large section of the populace was kept out of Vedic ceremonials on the grounds of caste and sacrificial lore came progressively to be confined to a very narrow coterie of the priestly class. The karma path was denied to the majority and those who were entitled to tread it pursued the ceremonials as a matter of dead routine. The path of *ñāna* was not for the common man, it could help men of exceptional calibre. The time had come for a sharp departure from old practice and a radical restatement of values.

The time produces the man, says the old adage. The 7th century after Christ produced the man needed to bring about this departure from old practice and the radical reassessment of values so badly needed. Indeed, the cancer had eaten so deep, nature decided to have a number of men of genius with the resoluteness of purpose needed to stem the further onset of the disease and effect a cure. The Tamil land produced such a galaxy of spiritual leaders in the Nāyanmār and the Āḻvārs as has not been witnessed anywhere else in India; even the great line of minstrel saints like Tukaram who flooded Maharashtra with the waters of devotion cannot be compared with this from the viewpoint of quality and extent of the corpus of songs and their influence on the people; there is also the vital fact that the Tamil saints were chronologically the first in the line and all the Bhakti movements in the rest of the country owed directly or indirectly to this great pioneering surge in the Tamil country.

The impact of these pioneers of the Bhakti movement on the country was great on account of a number of reasons; these reasons were of the nature of balancing factors which took into consideration the pressing need of the hour, the defects of the existing system and the attitude of the common people. One of such factors was that where Hindu religion was generally propagated through Sanskrit, these saints began to use Tamil and lovely, poetic Tamil at that. This naturally made the concepts of religion comprehensible to the people; it not only facilitated an intellectual comprehension, it enabled the heart of the people to be engaged, on account of the emotional appeal of the mother tongue.

The second factor was that while the medium of much of the earlier teaching was prosaic (the age of the *Cūttiram* had just ended and nothing in the world can be more prosaic than these over-condensed aphorisms), these saints of the Tamil land used poetry which could be sung to captivating tunes. Indeed, the first great impact of the Tamil Bhakti movement was on account of these melodious songs which could be sung in chorus by the multitude following the saints in their pilgrimages. Here was a method of worship in which there were no severe canons of adhikara (as to who can and cannot perform the rituals, for instance), where everyone could participate and fulfil himself. While the Vedic rituals were individual (though a group usually witnessed them) these sessions were group affairs where everyone could participate. And this, more than other things, sustained the interest of the rank and file in the movement.

The third factor was that where the Vedic religion had two kinds of spiritual exercise, the *Karma* and the *ñāṉa*, the Tamil saints promoted the purest kind of Bhakti. *Karma* not only involved questions of *adhikara*, the Karmic rituals were quite expensive and the major sacrifices had a royal budget; indeed they could be performed only by kings or with the aid of munificent grants from kings. *Ñāṉa*, the path of wisdom where the adherent is required to meditate on the

formless, attributeless Brahman can be trodden only by the gifted few with the intellectual and other qualities rarely present together. Walking along the path of wisdom has been compared to the exercise of treading on the edge of a razor, in the Upanishads; it is clearly not intended for the masses. But Bhakti described by Krishna as "easy to follow and within the perceptive scope of the senses" is clearly the kind of religious exercise for the majority of the people who have greater emotional than intellectual gifts. The fact that the *Tēvāram* and the *Pirapantam* movement was wholly a Bhakti exercise must be regarded as paramount in any assessment of the causes of its sensational success.

The two principal saint-minstrels at the vanguard of the movement in Saivism were Appar and Ñāṉa Campantar; they were closely followed by Cuntarar who initiated the cult of saint-worship, encompassing all the Saiva saints who had shown the path of love in the previous two to three hundred years. But, though the high honour of leadership should be handed down to Appar and Campantar, they were preceded by quite a length of time by a woman saint, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār whose three short poetical works of high lyrical and devotional quality set the tone for all that followed.

In a similar way, the leading light among the Vaiṣṇava saints was Nammāḻvār; but he was preceded by three saint-minstrels called Mutalāḻvārkaḷ whose hymns (earlier in time even to those of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār) must be regarded as the early dawn of the entire Bhakti movement. Despite their pioneer status, the quality of the three hundred hymns sung by them is quite good; their main charm consists in a guileless, totally selfless love for God without a trace of prejudice against other sects.

Let us now take up for a detailed examination the hymns composed during this period of roughly five hundred years from the 7th to the 12th cent. A.D. It is intended to study here only the genre of short

verses collected together in decades called *Patikams* which form the bulk of the Saiva scriptures and the entire corpus of the Vaiṣṇava Scriptures called the Four-Thousand. Longer works like the *Periyapurā ṇam* though very much organically related to these from the view-point of subject-matter are of a very different genre altogether. Hence it would be appropriate in a work devoted to genres to study such works under a different caption.

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār

We shall, first, take up the study of the hymns of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, the morning star of all the Saiva hymnists. She was born in a very wealthy merchant family of Kāraikkāl, a flourishing port of those days, not far from Pukār of *Cilappatikāram.* She married a rich merchant and should have settled down to the prosperous inanity of the wealthy classes; but she was of a very different mould and from her early childhood, she had nurtured a burgeoning love of Lord Siva as she confesses, later:

I have been flooded with a growing love
And I have been longing always to merge
With your handsome feet, ever since my birth,
Ever since I learnt the use of words.
Lord of divine hosts with the stain
Lovely to behold in your glowing neck!
When, O when will you deign to grace,
When will you banish my cares, my troubles? (1)

Her marriage runs into rough weather very soon; her husband realises her saintly calibre and feeling distinctly inadequate to deal with her as his wife, leaves the home for foreign climes and having prospered, settles down in a distant town with a new wife.

The last shackles of worldly bondage removed, the saint spends the rest of her life singing hymns like that on the Lord's Dance of Destruction which He undertakes at the end of the Kalpa. The Lord

grants her desire to see the dance, but as she could not bear to see it in her mortal form, she is converted into a ghoul, as one of His 'Bhootaganas'. The spectacle of the Lord's dance sends her into raptures which she captures in a thirty-stanza poem, unrivalled for its suggestion of frenzied movement.

This lady saint has composed another work where two metres are employed alternately; this must be the earliest example of this genre in Tamil. This led to the launching of poems with three metres and four coming in cycles. The saint is reputed to have travelled to the top of Mount Kayilāyam, walking on her head in order not to pollute the sacred region by trodden on it with her feet. Goddess Pārvati was wonder-struck at this and asked Lord Siva who this might be. And the Lord is said to have identified the saint as the "*ammai*" and welcomed her to the abode of immortal bliss. All the Saiva saints coming after her have held her in the highest esteem. Campantar did not want to go to Tiruvālaṅkāṭu and worship at the famous shrine there, simply because he thought it would be a sacrilege to tread the sanctified ground with his feet. Ultimately he did go and worship there only on the Lord of that shrine appearing in Campantar's dream and plaintively asking him to go there.

Appar

Tirunāvukkaracu who is better known as Appar was a convert to Jainism who got reconverted to Saivism mainly through the efforts of his elder sister, Tilakavatiyār, who was more a mother to him; she herself is counted one among the sixty-three saints of Saivism. With him starts the real movement; with him also starts the genre of short verses in units of ten called the *patikam* which characterises the entire epoch. Apart from a deep piety which he has in common with all the saints, Appar has an extraordinary humility which prompts him to regard God as the master, himself being one of His humblest servants. While this master-servant relationship forms the main

motif of his hymns, there are a number of *patikams* based on man-to-woman love where Appar makes deft use of the old concepts of *Akapporuḷ*. His poems are simple and unpretentious as befits the work of a simple, uncomplicated man but their poetic quality remains quite high, perhaps because they are uncontrived and also, of course, on account of his being totally wrapped up in his subject.

Considering him an apostate from their faith, the Jain advisors to the king of the realm gave Appar a lot of trouble from which all he escaped through the Lord's grace. Some of the hymns associated with these incidents are redolent with that total unflinching faith in his God that characterises all the greatest saints of the world; they also turn out to be great poetry. We can savour here one example where the saint says that the sacred Five Letters *'Namacivāya'* come to one's rescue if even one is bound to a stone pillar and thrown into the sea.

The effulgent Lord does protect us all
From all dangers if the five-lettered word
Is devoutly chanted, if on His feet
We place our hands in prayerful love.
If a pillar of stone is tied to us
And we are flung into the sea,
There's still no need to fear, to panic;
For "Namacivāya", the five-lettered chant
Shall be our safest anchorage. (2)

Appar was already established as a senior apostle when Campantar come on the scene. But such was his deep-seated humility, he considered it a privilege to assist in the carrying of Campantar's palanquin. The aging saint did now know that the younger one was going to meet him in his village Tiruppūnturutti. The palanquin followed by hundreds of eager devotees reached Appar's house where they were told that Appar had left only to meet Campantar. Appar,

who was in a near trance and lost in the crowd of devotees was brought back to the earth by the anxious questions mouthed by them about his whereabouts; he replied in typical humility "I am here, master, enjoying the privilege of bearing your palanquin!"

Campantar

Campantar jumped out of the palanquin and rushed in ecstasy towards Appar whom he embraced calling him, 'father' (Appar). This is a heartwarming story indicating how the greatest saints, held in reverential esteem by the people, are utterly without ego.

Campantar's spiritual ministry starts at the astonishing age of three. Like most children he insisted on accompanying his father one morning, when he set out for the sacred temple tank to have a dip. The child was left on the bank and the father went down the steps to the water; but the child was reassured as long as he could see his father. When the father immersed himself in the water and disappeared for the moment from the child's view, the latter began to cry. It is said that the Lord and His Consort appeared before the child and pacified him; the Goddess put him on Her lap and actually suckled him. When the child appeared happy, the divine pair disappeared.

The father came up and finding the child quite replete, with a tell-tale drop of milk on his lip, he questioned him as to who had nursed him. Pointing to the temple, the child replied in ten fascinating stanzas that it was indeed the Lord with His Consort who and appeared before him and nursed him. Thus began the amazing spiritual career of Campantar.

One of the earliest stories of a miraculous happening associated with Campantar is where he was presented with a pair of golden cymbals by the Lord enshrined at Tirukkōlakkā, a village situated very near Cirkāḻi, his birth place. In another place, God appeared in

the dream of the village brahmins directing them to receive Campantar with all honours and specifically to shield him from the sun by holding a moving *'pantal'* made of pearls.

Miracles abound in the life of this leader of the Saiva movement. In a place near Tiruchi, he effected the cure of a strange malady afflicting a local princess. In Tirumarukāl, he brought back to life a youth who had eloped with a girl the previous night only to get bitten by a snake when the young lovers were sleeping in an abandoned temple building. In Mylapore he brought back Pūmpāvai to life; when her grateful parents offered her in marriage to him he turned down the offer saying that he had come to occupy the position of a father to her as he had brought her back to life from the dead.

Many saints got associated with this youthful singer of hymns, attracted by his total devotion, his gift of poesy and the many miracles he effected. Appar himself, as we saw earlier joined the band of devotees accompanying the young hymnist. There is another incident associating these two spiritual leaders. Appar and Campantar, during the course of their tireless wanderings all over the Tamil land turned up together at a famed shrine in Tiruviḻimiḻalai in the Cōḻa territory. Each was followed by a very large number of adherents who wanted nothing more than staying with their leader and singing the hymns composed by him.

Suddenly a famine struck and food became scarce and expensive. The two saints decided to leave the place in order not to cause hardship to their numerous devotees. But a disembodied voice in the temple directed them to stay on with their followers, adding that everyday, at the end of their worship, they would find a gold coin placed for each of them with which to buy food for their group.

The saints decided to remain and sure enough, the next day, they found a gold coin apiece on the *'palipīṭam'* (the altar). But

there was a catch to this; while Appar's men had no difficulty in feeding the entire group sumptuously, Campantar's coin had much less of gold content and fetched a lesser quantity of food, not adequate to feed the entire throng.

So the next day, Campantar sang a decade reprimanding the Lord for such an act of discrimination which was sure to bring Him to disrepute. This decade composed in one of the shortest metres and full of strong remarks of reproof delighted the Lord who agreed to give the same type of coin to both everyday, as long as they stayed on. We have repeated instances of the Lord stage-managing things only so that these gifted composers would be provoked to sing in sorrow or anger. In religious tradition, the Lord becomes the highly gifted patron of letters who loves poetry and poets above everything else and who may sometimes resort to even morally unsupportable acts in order that He might enjoy good poetry. There are striking instances of this propensity of the Lord in Cuntarar's life. We saw earlier how He appeared in Campantar's dream and exhorted him to proceed to Ālankāṭu, all because He did not want to be cheated out of a melodious decade from the hymnist's lips.

Though Campantar's life on the earth was extremely short-indeed, he did not get out of his teens-it was a life of great variety and usefulness to society. He sang a great many *patikams* travelling from temple to temple, attracting an ever-increasing number of followers who loved the music and the poesy and prized the ennobling proximity to the great saint. There was no selfishness attending any of his acts, all that he did was to dry a tear and bring a smile on the face of a suffering mortal. Once his father needed quite a sum of money to perform a sacrifice and as is customary in India, he looked to his son to provide him with the funds. Campantar knew only one way to get anything and that was to pray to God which he did-in the famous shrine of Tiruvāvaṭuturai. At the end of the melodious *patikam* cast in a somewhat unusual metre of six lines with four in

one pattern and two in another, the Lord sent him a bag of 1000 gold coins through one of his '*bhootas*' (ghouls) with the remark that it was an inexhaustible source of wealth as the extraction of coins from it did not diminish it. Excepting this, all the miracles performed by Campantar were for others; the only conditions he needed fulfilled in a suppliant were that he was devoted to the Lord and was a strict follower of the moral law.

The most significant of the episodes connected with Campantar is where he vanquishes the Jains, converts the Pāṇṭiya king and re-establishes Saivism in the Pāṇṭiya kingdom. Worried over the drift of the Pāṇṭiya king more and more towards Jainism, the Pāṇṭiya Queen and the minister who were ardent devotees of Siva sent for the greatest protagonist of Saivism, Campantar. He went to Maturai and in a series of debates and through miraculous happenings trounced the Jains overwhelmingly. The Jain monks in accord with the pact they themselves had made died at the stakes. The king was cured of a serious ailment through the spiritual powers of the youthful saint and the Pāṇṭiya kingdom rescued for Saivism. We read of numerous supernatural happenings brought about by these saints in order to secure material benefits for other devotees. But their teaching and their ministry are not confined to this. For, the keynote of the philosophy informing the thoughts and acts of all these saints is that kind of unconditional surrender to God which is not affected by the way they are dealt with by Him. Whether He removes their grief or does nothing to reduce it or, in the extreme case, goes out of the way to reinforce it, the true devotee goes on worshipping Him; what subsists between them is not a commercial contract which stands broken if one party breaks it. The devotee's love of God is not conditional upon God coming to his rescue, it is absolute, it stands by itself. Saint after saint has confirmed this in sweet verse, as in their every act. Campantar himself in the *patikam* sung to obtain money for his father performing sacrifice asserts his rock-like devotion that is unswerving in the face of calamities; the English

translation combines ideas from a number of stanzas so as to give a total picture of the impact made by the decade:

Personified knowledge, Lord of the shrine
That contain in the neck the poison from the sea
Zooming up with the desired ambrosia!
I bow down to you, I worship you
Unflinching in the face of calamities
Undaunted by diseases, by day and night
Regardless of good or evil befalling.
But is this, O Lord, the way you deal
With a devotee who loves you all the time
Through thick and thin, through adversities?
You fail to respond when a prayer is sent.
Is this the way you bless a servant? (3)

There is a clear statement of this principle in Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's hymns; and a reiteration is found in the *Tiruvācakam* and in some of the later works like the *Apirāmi Antāti*. And, in a glorious decade Kulacēkara Āḻvār gives a poetic shape to this philosophy with the aid of nine metaphors. From the doctrine of the Vedic days that you pray to God for material advantages and your are sure to get them, the philosophy has risen to the dizzy heights where you continue to pray to God even if you do not gain anything material for Him, even if He only heaps more sufferings on you.

Even as Appar is thought by later writers to have developed the theme of devotion on the lines of the master-servant relationship, Campantar is credited with having favoured the father-son relationship in his hymns. As a child hymnist, this may have come naturally to him. But a variety of approaches can be discovered in his songs and his poems on the man-to-woman love are some of the best, making excellent use of nature as a backdrop; his songs on the Lord of Kuṟumpalā (Kuṟṟālam) and Aṇṇāmalai are highly poetical.

As against the tone of total submission and self-disparagement in Appar's poetry, we notice the air of assurance of a born leader used to command, in Campantar's compositions.

Cuntarar

Cuntaramūrtti Nāyaṉār, referred to as Cuntarar for brief was a very different person from both Appar and Campantar. He was a very personable and accomplished young man born to a family of temple priests who was brought up in the royal palace as the king of the realm took a liking to him. A wedding was fixed up for him but had to be abandoned on account of an extraordinary claim made by an old man who appeared on the scene and proved with the aid of records that Cuntarar's grandfather had given it in writing that he and his descendants were the old man's slaves for ever. It soon becomes clear that the old man is none other than the Lord Himself come to claim Cuntarar's services for the furtherance of the cause of religion.

The Lord asks Cuntarar to use his considerable poetical powers to sing His glory. Cuntarar is diffident but the Lord tells him, "You called me mad when I came to claim you. You can start singing about Me with that word as My attribute!". So, Cuntarar begins to sing and hymns of the sweetest melody flow from him in a flood as he worships at shrine after Saiva shrine. The Lord drinks it all in and clamours for more. When Cuntarar decides not to visit Malaṉpāṭi, the Lord enshrined there comes in his dream and entreats him to visit the place and panegyrise Him.

The Lord adopts a less honourable device to make Cuntarar sing about a shrine which he was not proposing to visit when he was returning, laden with expensive presents given to him by the devoted Cēra king, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ. Cuntarar was waylaid by robbers who took away everything he had, leaving him angry and frus-

trated. He enquired around and was told that there was a Siva temple at Murukanpūṇṭi. Cuntarar goes there in a towering rage and in a poem wonderfully redolent with emotion takes up with the Lord for allowing such criminal acts to take place in His range. It was of course the Lord who had designed the whole nefarious episode with the aid of his "bhootas', so that He could get his favourite minstrel to visit His shrine and panegyrise Him. All the royal presents are returned to him with the Lord's blessings and Tamil literature is the richer by a *patikam* of frothing sentiment.

Even though his wedding initially fixed up, had to be abandoned. Cuntarar marries Paravai who makes a devoted wife to him. She feels the pinch at times, however, and sends him out to earn some money with which to run the household and look after devotee-guests in the manner prescribed. On one such occasion he tells the Lord with friendly liberty that he would not allow Him to move an inch unless He presents him with gold and gems; this was at Nākapaṭṭiṉam. On another occasion, he visits Pukalūr and sings about the Lord but forgets to ask Him for funds. He sleeps in the temple with bricks for pillows and finds, on waking up in the morning that they had been metamorphosed into gold. He thanks the Lord in a remarkable decade but finding the bricks too heavy to carry he drops them in the river, returning, empty-handed home. But, such is his faith, he takes his wife to the temple tank and immersing himself in the water, recovers the gold bricks from the bottom of the tank.

The Nāyaṉār feels the urge to travel north, worshipping at the Siva shrines in the Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam till he comes to Tiruvoṟṟiyūr which is part of Madras city now. Here he falls in love with a temple courtesan Caṅkili by name and prays to the Lord to help him to get her. The Lord makes him promise never to leave Oṟṟiyūr; as a condition to be fulfilled by him and when the infatuated saint agre... ...akes place. But very soon he starts missing

the daily worship at Tiruvārūr, his birth place with which his name is inextricably entwined and leaves the city limits, on which he loses the sight in both his eyes. Many and hauntingly sad are the hymns he sings at the Siva shrines on the way; the Lord restores sight in one eye. Cuntarar reaches Tiruvārūr and is rewarded with sight in the other eye too.

But trouble looms for him in another direction; for Paravai, learning of his second attachment is in dudgeon, refusing to see him. Cuntarar, in true saintly fashion, would only appeal to God for help in this matter, as at all times of crisis. He threatens to dash his head against the linkam and die if divine help is denied. The Lord, in sweet helplessness like the devoted mother of an obstinate child, takes the form of a brahmin and goes to Paravai to intercede on behalf His favourite devotee. Paravai first refuses, then consents, realising the true identify of the intercessor. The couple is reunited; but the episode has an unpleasant fall-out. A fanatical devotee of Siva, Ēyarkōn Kalikkāman begins to detest Cuntarar for having engaged the Lord to perform the lowly duties of an intercessor between man and wife. The Lord again exerts Himself to make peace between His devotees through a miracle.

Cuntarar's colourful life comes to an end and he is taken to Kayilāyam on the white elephant, Airāvatam. Ceramān Perumāḷ, his truest friend, could not bear to continue to live after he had gone; he pursues his idol on a horse all the way to the Lord's abode and he too is admitted in. Indeed, even though all saints love fellow devotees, Cuntarar loved them to distraction and was actually the progenitor of a movement to honour and worship all Siva's devotees. He sang a *patikam* called *Tiruttoṇṭat Tokai* on them which got expanded centuries later into the *Periyapurāṇam*, a detailed account of the Lord's devoted saints. Cuntarar's hymns are characterized by a sweet melody and a dexterous use of words; he preferred to treat

God as his friend and manifested in his hymns the many facets of the privileged relationship subsisting between friends. Like the other two leading saints, Cuntarar too has written a few *patikams* using man-to-woman love as the motif.

Some selected hymns

Let us now enjoy a few of the stanzas in translation.

Campantar visits the most sacred of all Siva shrines, the one at Citamparam and sings with ecstasy of the Lord and His devotees, the Three Thousand brahmins of the place:

Tending as taught of old the sacrificial fire,
At Tillai Brahmans pure drive out misfortune dire.
There dwells the First of all, moon-crowned, and those who cleave
For ever to His foot, no cleaving sin will grieve. (4)

His single minded devotion to the Lord to the exclusion not only of other deities but of all worldly thought is emphasised in a decade sung at Kacci Ekāmpam, out of which a stanza is reproduced here for enjoyment:

He is the pith of the holy writ;
And in the tangle of His hair
The spotless crescent's ray is lit;
He is both Lord and Lady fair
He our great sovereign doth abide
In Kacci Ēkampam's fair town.
My mind can think of naught beside,
Naught beside Him, and Him alone. (5)

He was a native of the wonderfully fertile Kāviri basin and he visited most of the Siva shrines in this region replete with temples. Among them is the one at Kuraṅkaṇilmuṭṭam, very near his own Cirkāḻ i where his poetry is fed by his twin enthusiasm for the Lord

and for the green basin of the river of the Tamils.

The great Lord bears the battle-axe; in His crest
Rests the glorious river; He is enshrined in
Kuraṅkaṇilmuṭṭam, girt with fecund and watery fields;
There in the tanks, the carp leap
Over lotuses and lilies and cause them blossom.
They that worship Him in melting devotion
Are freed from the resultant pain of evil. (6)

Travelling westward but not leaving the hallowed land of the river the saint comes to Tirukkāṭṭuppaḷḷi where he sings of the Lord, at the same time pointing out the fragrant logs of sandal and *Akil* that the stream was carrying down from the forests of its birth as her dowry to the sea, its lord.

Let us sing the feet of the trident bearer
the Lord who dances with ringing anklets,
and loves his abode
where his loving devotees praise him,
Kāṭṭuppaḷḷi on the Kāviri
who rushes down in many gurgling streams,
washing sandal and 'akil'
with soft sounds onto her banks. (7)

But when singing of the Lord at '*Citticcaram*', he has eyes only for His wonderful personality that shines forth even though its adornments are such ungainly things like the datura flower and the matted hair and the white ash that is smeared all over the body:

A heron-feather and the bright datura
adorn his matted hair.
His flame-red body
is covered with white ash.
Over his girdle and loincloth
he has bound a tiger skin

encircled by lovely snakes.
Thus with anklets ringing,
the Lord of Citticaram shrine
Comes riding on his bull. (8)

When saints visit the shrine at Neyttāṉam, they tarry there for a while going lovingly over the spiritual glory of the temple town, the mention of which name shall banish all vileness, all sin and sorrow from the devotee's mind. To Campantar it has a special appeal and he sings blissfully of the sacred place.

So ye but say Neyttāṉam, is the home
Of our great Lord who wears in His long hair
The crescent moon, the river and the snake,
Neyttāṉam, where chaste maidens gather fair
On the north bank of Kāviri's loud stream,
Your vileness, guiltiness, the sin you dread
Your sorrows many, shall be banished. (9)

Appar's was a personality softened to the state of a liquid by the love of God. His favourite mood in worship was one of total self-disparagement; the relationship he preferred with the Lord that was peculiarly his own was that of a serf towards his absolute master who had the powers of the high, the middle and the low justice over him. But when worldly powers try to browbeat him, witness, gentle reader how he reacts with a fierce independence which is most striking when it comes from one of his docile nature; this is one of the greatest hymns in all Saiva Scripture, perhaps in all religious literature:

Subjects we are to none; Death we fear not
Hell we suffer not; we are not weaklings.
We know no disease; we are serfs to none.
We enjoy eternal bliss; no misery for us!
For we are the servitors of the King
Of all beings who is bound to none.

He wears white chanks in His ears, Caṅkara
We are His and we take refuge at His lotus feet. (10)

Appar sings with a divine joy of the glory of the Lord who represents the ultimate in sacrifice; He showers the best of things on His devotees but adorns Himself with things which people detest and abhor. He prefers to station himself in the burning ghats from which people turn away. Here is a stanza from the decade he composed on the Lord at Kacci Māyaṉam:

The Lord who is concorporate with His consort
Whose eyes are tinted with collyrium
Abides in the Crematorium at Kāñci;
All matted is His hair; He is flawless;
He has no equal; He is not of the human species;
He belongs to no single town;
Thus is He; even thus is His form and hue.
If He be not beheld with the eye of His grace,
Who can paint Him either this way or that?
His Godhead is ineffable. (11)

The Arttanārīcuvara form where the male and the female features appear fused together has always had the greatest fascination for Siva devotees. Appar sings in delight of this in a poem beautiful for its vivid portrayal of the two-in-one form:

An earring of bright new gold glows on one ear;
a coiled conch shell sways on the other.
On one side he chants the melodies of the ritual Veda,
on the other, he gently smiles.
Matted hair adorned with sweet koṉṟai blossoms
on one half of his head,
And a woman's curl on the other, he comes.
The one is the nature of his form, the other, of hers.
And both are the very essence of his beauty. (12)

In a mood of deep philosophical contemplation Appar pictures

man's wasted efforts at self-sustenance through a sustained metaphor sung at Cuntarar's Tiruvārūr:

With the body in which life abides, for the post,
The heart, for the water-bowl
And misery, for the horizontal beam,
Holding the pole of sorrow
I plied the shadoof; the crops were not fed;
In vain did I bale out water and stand
Fatigued by the Five (senses),
O Lord of Ārūr Mūlaṭṭam. (13)

Continuing in the same vein is another decade, this sung at Tiruvatikai Vīraṭṭāṉam, a favourite place for this saint and one of the eight shrines where the Lord's victories over the forces of evil are commemorated:

My fickle heart one love forsakes,
And forthwith to some other clings;
Swiftly to some one thing it sways,
And e'en as swiftly backwards swings.
O Thou with crescent in Thy hair,
Atikai Vīraṭṭāṉam's is Lord,
Fixed at Thy feet henceforth I lie,
For Thou hast broken my soul's cord. (14)

There is a lilting decade in which God's love of man stands revealed. Let us enjoy a stanza from it, sung at one of his well-loved shrines, Pūnturutti where was placed the moving scene of the getting together of Appar and Campantar to which we have referred.

The moving water He made stand unmoving
in His hair;
And He my thoughtless heart hath fixed in thought
of Him alone;
He taught me that which none can learn, what none
can see laid bare;

What tongue tells not He told; me He pursued and
made His own.
The spotless pure, the holy One, my fell disease
He healed,
And in Pūnturutti to me, e'en me, Himself
revealed. (15)

Cuntarar adopted the path of friendship to reach the Lord; this privileged relationship sat very naturally upon him on account of his spirited nature which sometimes prompted him to take up with the Lord what he considered to be His inappropriate deeds. In such a mood, he sings a scorching song at Paccilācciramam which the Lord obviously lapped up as eagerly as the panegyrical hymns of this and other saints:

I'm not abusing him or showing contempt; all the time
I know him as our Lord.
For many days, I, famous Ārūra̱n from
Nāvalūr with its rich fields, have
Sought to worship the feet of the lord of Paccilācciramam,
Calling to him with my voice, thinking of
Him with my mind-but if he won't put up
With the things I have said, can't we find some other god?
(16)

At Tirunelvāyil A̱rattu̱rai, a shrine whose Lord instructed the priests to welcome young Campantar with all temple honours, Cuntarar sings with a certain melancholy, disparaging earthly life for its pointless transience:

Aloe-wood from the mountains and luminous
jewels are cast forth by the Niva River in its course;
here, on its shore, at Nelvāyil A̱rattu̱rai, you
dwell as of old, flawless lord crowned with
the white crescent moon.
I know how in the world life passes like a

word: 'Their birth was celebrated, then lived
their life, dressed up, grew old and died.'
I have followed you as your servant; now
tell me-by what ruse can I survive? (17)

[By aloe - wood, perhaps is meant the *akil*)

Continuing in the same vein of despondency, the saint composes a lovely decade in Tiruviṭaimarutūr from which a stanza can be enjoyed:

Like a donkey laden with a burden of saffron,
harried through a wasteland.
half-dead, I stumble, father-trapped in a
whirling vortex.
And you, my heart-why go on weeping? I am
too much a fool to call to Hara of the lovely eyes.
Show me in your mercy some way to be saved,
father, lord, dwelling in Iṭaimarutu. (18)

We referred earlier to the bitterness in Cuntarar's heart at the Lord's hesitancy in giving him back the power of sight in the other eye. He sang a particularly critical decade where the metre chosen and the way it has been handled by the master-poet point up his anger at the Lord's intransigence:

Those who have become your servants in
irrevocable bondage need no others;
Yet their hearts go on smouldering within
them like a fire contained. Their faces
grow thin.
For though they are your own servants,
whenever they speak of their sorrow, you
just sit there, impassive, O Lord of Tiruvārūr -
We wish you luck; go away! (19)

But it was not all the time vituperation that Cuntarar hurled at Lord Siva. How lovingly he could sing portraying Him as the essence behind music and indeed all else as in

He is the seven fold music and the fruit thereof;
He is nectar sweet and also my friend who stands by me,
Even when I commit wrongful deeds, He gifted to me
Paravai whose eyes are like unto two halves
Of a symmetrically slit tender-mango;
He is my Rules; lo, can, I, the poor, brainless one,
Suffer separation from Him - Lord of Ārūr? (20)

and in another, expressing his gratitude for His ineffable grace in uniting him with Caṅkili of O<u>rr</u>iyūr;

To save the celestials He gave them nectar while He himself
Ate the poison of the ocean where barks plied aplenty;
He cared even for me - the worthless one - and had me
United with Caṅkili! How can I - the evil one -
Be parted from the Truthful One - my Deity of Ārūr -
To abide here but to waste away? (21)

Let us conclude with one of the most popular hymns from the entire Saiva Scripture, where he protests asserting that he can never forget Him, when he fails to visit a shrine (at Ma<u>l</u>apāṭi) and the Lord enshrined there, frustrated at His missing a decade from the great poet demanded to know whether the saint had forgotten Him.

O god with the golden form,
You bind the tiger skin around your waist,
and wear the golden ko<u>nr</u>ai blossom
on gleaming red hair!
O King, great jewel, ruby in Ma<u>l</u>apāṭi.
O Mother, whom can I think of
but you? (22)

The other Saiva Saint - Minstrels

After Cuntarar, a number of poet-saints are seen singing the praise of Lord Siva without attaining to the level reached by the three great saints. The works of nine minstrels make up a book, the ninth in the library of twelve canonical books. Tirumāḻikait Tēvar sang what is known as *Tiruvicaippā* notable for its musical excellence. Cēntaṉār composed *Tiruppallāṇṭu*, praying for a long life for the Lord, after the manner of Periyāḻvār's benedictory decade. This minstrel is believed to have belonged to one of the lowest castes. It is a matter of gratification that this minstrel-saint could sing the only benedictory hymn in Saivism; a legend says that he offered a kind of rice preparation called 'Kaḷi' to Siva, in memory of which Saivites offer the same preparation to the Lord every year in December on *Tiruvātirai* festival. Even though the hold of caste was very strong in the society, undeniable merit and great sincerity could raise a person up, cutting through the barriers of caste. It is also remarkable that a Cōḻa monarch, by name Kaṇṭarātittar also sang hymns included in the same book along with those of Cēṉtaṉār. Among the others whose hymns are included in the 9th Book can be mentioned Karuvūrt Tēvar, Vēṇāṭṭu Aṭikaḷ, Tiruvāli Amutaṉār and Puruṭōttama Nampi. Tirumāḻikait Tēvar was regarded as a siddha and temples for him and systems of worship arose in the years immediately following his death.

The tenth book is entirely occupied by Tirumūlar's *Tirumantiram*. This is a work of mysticism, yoga and Saiva philosophy, highly praised by people of a religious bent. However in a work of literary genres, it need not hold us up very much. Many legends have grown up around the author one of which credits him with having lived for 3000 years and more; and according to tradition, he would immerse himself in deep penance, surfacing once a year to compose one stanza. The 3000 stanzas of which the work is composed thus took 3000 years to complete. A very early age is claimed for

him by some but it is clear that he lived centuries after the three *Tēvāram* saints. The literary value of the work cannot be considered as high as that of *Tēvāram*.

The 11th Canonical Book of the Saivas contains the hymns of a number of minstrel saints. Out of them four with the names of *Caṅkam* poets dominate; they are Nakkiratēvar, Kapilatēvar, Paraṇatevar and Kallāṭatēvar. Cēramāṉ Perumāṉ who was a close friend of Cuntarar was one of the minstrels whose hymns find a place in this book. Nakkiratēva Nāyaṉār has composed a '*Cittirappirapantam*' where the numbers 1 to 7 are mentioned in the ascending and descending order, following Campantar. It is to be noted that *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* is included as a work of this Nakkiratēvar in the 11th Book, underscoring the confusion caused by the similarity of names between two poets separated by a 1000 years. His short account of Kaṇṇappar's heroic deed in taking out his eye to replace Siva's ailing eye is very well done with the emphasis on the emotional drama, without wasting words on unnecessary descriptions.

Kapilatēvar composed the first complete work on Vināyakar in Tamil; it is titled *Mūtta Nāyaṉār Tiruviraṭṭai Maṇimālai* using two metres alternately. He has also composed an *antāti* of a 100 stanzas. Kallāṭa Tēvar composed a small work narrating briefly Kaṇṇ appar's act of self-sacrifice; it is briefer than Nakkiratēvar's and of equally high quality. A member of the Pallava royal house-hold who took sanyasa under the name Aiyaṭikaḷ Kāṭavarkōṉ composed a work describing the main centres of Saiva pilgrimage. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's three works are also classed under this 11th book as also the works of Paṭṭiṉattuppiḷḷaiyār and Nampiyāṇṭār Nampi. The last mentioned is credited with having organised the Saiva hymns into eleven books. Paṭṭiṉattuppiḷḷaiyār is extremely popular in the Tamil land for his most sincere piety and his total renunciation. Scholars say there were three persons of this name and popular

legend has fused all of them into one. His poems breathe an extreme air of detachment.

The 12th book is the *Periyapurāṇam* which deserves detailed examination in the appropriate place in this work.

The Āḻvārs - Periyāḻvar

Long before the Āḻvārs came on the scene, there was a sect dedicated to the worship of Tirumāl in Tamil Nadu, called the 'Pākavatar'. This must have been a small sect from the viewpoint of the number of adherents but their influence on the community was quite considerable. They may have been vagrant sanyasins who spent their life worshipping at the many shrines dedicated to Tirumāl. Not much, however, is known about them. The story therefore starts from the three Āḻvārs called Poykaiyāḻvār, Pūtattāḻvār and Pēyāḻvār collectively referred to, on account of their chronological primacy as the First Āḻvārs (Mutalāḻvār). They composed each a hundred stanzas, not divided into *patikams;* the metre adopted is the *veṇpā* . Their literary quality is quite high and the saint-minstrels display commendable skill in manipulating the metre. The approach is that of simple, straightforward devotion, free from any prejudice towards other sects. There is no contrived striving after effect and the tone throughout is one of great moral and spiritual earnestness. Let us enjoy one example each from these three centuries of hymns.

To shatter chains of parents jailed
Krishna came to protect all
And angel multitudes
Don your toes with flower dew.

-Poykai Āḻvār (23)

He alone gifts quick reliefs,
Pulsing our aches and pleas;
He alone determines the chosen few -

who should plead and get relieved.

-Pūtattāḻvār (24)

The Lord leaving the warmth
Of pythoned couch in Eden Sea
Has laid His heart at rest
In velvet silk of my soft breast.

- Pēyāḻvār (25)

An important Āḻvār with a very special title to fame is Periyāḻvār. He was a poor brahmin who elected to remain poor throughout his life so that he could serve the lord in the way he wanted to; he loved growing flowers in his garden, to pick and wreathe them into beautiful garlands and deck the idol of the Lord called Vaṭ apattiracāyi (one who reclines on a banyan leaf). *Kaiṅkariyam* (service) to the Lord gets a high ranking in Vaiṇavam among the forms of worship and Periyāḻvār elected it as the most fitting way in which he could serve the Lord.

He would have continued in this manner unobtrusively serving God in a corner of the Pāṇṭiya country, unknown to the world; but the Lord has other plans for him. He appeared in his dream and instructed him to proceed to Maturai, the capital city where the king was holding a religious debate and speak and argue in advocacy of the Vaiṇava faith. Periyāḻvār, much embarassed and diffident asked the Lord in the dream. How can I, an ignoramus, take on trained polemicians of other faiths? I may prove unequal to the task and the faith will suffer on that account!". The Lord, smiling, told him He would look after all that and directed him to go.

So the obedient servant of the Lord went to Maturai and in the debates that ensued in the presence of the Pāṇṭiya king, Periyāḻvār emerged triumphant to the surprise of all the scholars gathered there who had not heard of him at all. The king presented him with a bundle full of gold coins as promised but desired to honour this

humble victor of the debate further. So he took him on elephant-back in a triumphant procession around his capital city. It is said that the Lord Himself, desiring to watch this, appeared in the heavens; He was perhaps invisible to all else but Periyāḻvār , who was not pleased at this but actually dismayed at His action as he feared that His associating Himself with any mortal's life may bring harm to Him. Forgetting, like a mother, in his frenzy of love that no harm could touch the Lord of all the worlds, he began to sing the famous '*pallāṇṭu*' a song of benediction seeking to bless the Lord with hundreds of years of life! This song, so clearly indicative of his overwhelming love of the Lord lifted him from the level of the other Āḻvārs and got for him the appellation Periyāḻvār , "the major saint."

The humble devotee did not know any other use for the money he got as the prize of the debate than to invest in a bigger and better flower garden. His garland service to the Lord continued, now on a bigger scale and he was quite content with his lot in life. He might have had a secret want in his heart, he was childless; but he derived the fullest pleasure and compensation from the particular attitude he adopted in his worship of the Lord. The attitude was that of a mother to her child; this is the purest kind of love there is, this side of the grave. There is a pithy saying equating a mother's love to God's love: "God could not be everywhere, so he created mothers." But here is a reversal of the roles, for a human assumes the role of a mother to God.

There have been certain characters in the Purāṇas which have assumed the role of mother to God in His incarnations like Kaucalya and Yacota (the latter's characterization in Mahabharata is referred to here, though very slight. The Bhagavata where Yasōta receives elaborate treatment was perhaps a much later work, later to Periyāḻvār by centuries). But Periyāḻvār 's treatment is fuller, more sincerely conceived than these earlier portrayals. Indeed his work has inspired a whole genre, the *Piḷḷaittamiḻ* which has been exploited to

the full in the later centuries. Let us savour a few of these poems bursting with motherly love.

The Krishna baby is brought secretly from Kamca's prison to the village of the cowherds where, on him is lavished all the love the cow-herdesses were capable of. The child is given presents by the gods in heaven and often shows its divinity when least expected. Its divine exploits and miraculous deeds like the killing of Pūtaṉa and Cakata are referred to endearingly and with amazement. The mother Yacōta proceeds to pamper him and surround him with luxuries. But sometimes his pronounced tendency to transgress limits brings punishments on him. He is extremely playful and is the acknowledged leader of all the boys in the village. The doting mother sometimes says in exasperation.

There are boys without number in this village
But, for all the transgressions you are singled out
O Krishna mine, as the sole culprit! (26)

All these sentiments and references to the incidents are found in the verses where Periyāḻvār, speaking as Yacōta, describes her attempts to bathe Krishna, dress and deck him and suckle him.

Child Krishna's beauty captivates every-body but his pranks, first enjoyable, now begin to irritate and anger others and eventually even the doting mother who takes punitive action:

Village maids
Reporting stealth
Of cheese galore
By Krishna and his mates,
His mother ropes his limbs
And chaining him to stone roller
Sheds oceans of tears
In swift remorse. (27)

He looks a typical child full of enchantment but performs supernatural deeds of valour to the amazement of the villagers:

Your earthed a wheel demon
And sucked the paps
Of demon woman
And drank her soul:
You cast to wind
A calf giant.
All foes erased
And we amazed. (28)

When Krishna learns to walk hesitantly taking tumbles and falls as any earthly child, the cow-herdesses are amazed to find the unique footprints of conch and discus left on the ground:

As Krishna walks,
The divine wheel
And godly conch
Carved in each feet
Leave symbolised print
For us to rhapsodize
In furied songs
And fevered joys. (29)

A mother's entreaty to the child to wear a wick in the holes bored in his ears in order that the holes do not close is tenderly conveyed in this verse:

"My ears swelled
Others will scoff,"
Krishna wept
And Yacota chided herself
For not boring his ears
In younger years
And to Lord appealed
To her words heed. (30)

And another decade of entreaty to the child to come and be bathed is justly famous and is recited in all Tirumāl temples when the idols are ceremonially bathed:

Your golden locks
Stained with dust,
Your trunk mired
With cattle heaps,
All me ridicule
For bad upbringing;
You are not ashamed;
Your mates will mock. (31)

There are other poems of Periyāḻvār, not cast quite in this vein, but full of his overflowing love, presented in the simplest diction with a candour and lack of artifice not often met with in literature. There is a decade being the report of Hanuman's speech, addressed to Citai in captivity where, in some of the stanzas the faithful messenger gives important oral evidence of his authenticity as Rāma's accredited representative. In one of them he describes a very private scene where Citai binds Rāma with garlands-an event not found described in Vālmīki but quite likely to have happened between a loving pair and excellent evidence to prove the messenger's authenticity. Let us enjoy the stanza:

My Goddess!
Home of jasmin flowers!
Listen with eyes
Deerlike in looks!
You bound Rāma
With jasmin wreath one night
And this you can remember. (32)

In three other '*patikams*' the 'Āḻvār' describes the glory of sacred places like Tirumāliruñcōlai and Tirukkōṭṭiyūr. In a fourth, he

describes a sacred city Kaṇṭaṉkaṭinakar on the bank of the Ganges with such verve and tempo, the reader feels he is being pushed forward by the powerful current of the river. In three *patikams* oozing with devotion, the Āḻvār praises Tiruvaraṅkam and the Lord enshrined there. In one of the stanzas he makes a statement highly valuable in theology - that man does not deserve help from God through his calibre, his merits or his actions; if God still helps him, it is on account of His compassion which bridges the tremendous gap between His glorious eminence and man's lowly status. This idea has been used by many others coming after Periyāḻvār notably Parācara Paṭṭar and Vētānta Tēcikaṉ. In this stanza, there is another notable feature; the saint-minstrel urges people to say their prayers, perform worship when still physically vigorous as a stage comes in everyone's life when he cannot perform any action efficiently:

You rescued an elephant
When all its resistance was lost,
You alone can grant my want
To be among your chosen:
When my end is nigh
And all my limbs lie dead
I beseech now your assurance
For my sure deliverance. (33)

Periyāḻvār's need for an object on which to shower his paternal (and maternal) affection had been more than fulfilled through his outpourings of hymns on the Krishna infant. But God desiring to fulfil it otherwise too, made him discover a female child in the tuḷaci bushes. He took over the child, named her Kōtai and brought her up affectionately as if his own. Kōtai nourished in her heart a great love for the Lord even from her childhood and decided to marry Him. When efforts were made by her foster parents to find a suitable match for her, she feels miserable and being gifted with poesy, she expresses her feelings in the matter through the aptest metaphor a brahmin girl could call up:

The offering intended for the gods in the heavens
Made ready by the brahmins for a sacrifice
Draws a jackal from the woods
Makes it smell and go round that
In eager desire-so, if my breasts
That have grown large for the Lord That bears
The conch and the disc are bandied about
In talks of marriage to a human stripling,
I shall not be able to survive it
I shall not live, O god of love! (34)

Āṇṭāḷ

Kōtai, now re-christened Āṇṭāḷ on account of the fact that the Lord displayed a marked preference for garlands worn by her first, composed two works in her short life. The more famous of the two, the *Tiruppāvai* constitutes a new literary genre. In it Āṇṭāḷ takes on the role of a cowherdess of Lord Krishna's days; she describes the vow that she and other young girls of the village take which involves their bathing in the cold water of the river early in December-January mornings and performing the worship of *Katyayani* in the form of an earthen icon in order to secure the Lord Himself as their husband. The genre provides the opportunity to the poet to describe the way the girls try to wake up each other by praising the Lord and the ceremonial they have undertaken to perform. *Tiruppāvai* makes the cowherd-girls go to Krishna's house and under the guise of asking for some equipment needed for the ceremony, seek His blessings for the success of the endeavour. The verses where the poetess describes Krishna are particularly attractive as are those where they portray the ceremonial and its aftermath.

The work is high quality literature as well as a rich '*Bhakti*' work; it is discoursed upon every day during the month of *Mārkaḻi* (December-January) in hundreds of forums all over Tamil Nadu to

sizeable crowds. The description of the daybreak over the cowherds' village with the sounds of the birds calling and the noise of churning is unrivalled in all literature; Āṇṭāḻ 's diction and control over the metre are of the highest quality. The devotion of the simple, unsophisticated cow-herdesses has been conveyed in a touching manner, possible only for a poetess who has entered wholly without reservation into the characters she has created. Vaiṇava tradition credits this girl brought up in a brahmin household with having acquired "the pastoral patois and the very odour of rancid butter" as a result of such an empathy. Let us savour one verse from this great poem:

In greying dawn we come to you
And sing your Feet, lotus-hued
And born as head of herdsman low
Our thirst for you should ever grow:
Your gifts galore give us sportingly
And keep us enclosed in you everlastingly!
We dive in you : we ache for you,
Our ageless urge in you submerge. (35)

The second *Pirapantam* of Āṇṭāḻ called *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* has a number of *patikams* where she speaks like a cowherdess and a few where she talks with the consciousness of her own self. There are a number of moving passages here, for her love is of the tempestuous variety and the delay of the Lord in accepting her torments her beyond all bearing. At one stage she begs her kinswomen to take her and leave her in one of the places frequented by Krishna as the touch of such hallowed spots might revive her and save her from a cruel death. Let us savour one piece from this decade where she pleads to be left near the spot in the Yamuna where Kaliya, the terrible serpent lived till he was humbled by the Lord.

My ills you cannot understand:
Sages and saints can divine

The fevered state of my stand
Raging in my mind:
If Lorḍ who tamed the Python wild
Dancing on hood beguiled.
Possess my breast with his sweet palm,
That hour my soul will ever embalm. (36)

Kulacēkarar̤

Kulacēkara Āḻvār was a Cēra king who considered his throne as of no account before the Lord, whose favourite *avatāram* was Rāma and place of pilgrimage, Srīraṅkam. Many legends are in circulation about his extreme devotion to the Lord and His devotees. Once, during a *Rāmāyaṇam* discourse, held in the beach, the lecturer, tactlessly, was growing eloquent in describing the anguish of Rama at the loss of Citai; the king was so thoroughly immersed in the story that he started wading into the waters crying, "Rāma, O Rāmā, I am coming to your aid!" and had to be saved by the agile courtiers who jumped into the sea at a considerable risk to themselves.

On another occasion, the loyal but narrow-minded ministers felt that the king was much too partial to the devotees of the Lord and much too disposed to spend the time discoursing on the Lord and His wondrous deeds to devote much time to his kingly duties; and desiring to prejudice the king against them, they secreted away a precious jewel of the king's favourite icon and spread the rumour that one of the impoverished devotees might have stolen it. The standard method of proving guilt or innocence in those days (as in old Europe) was trial by ordeal; a snake was kept hungry in a pot and the accused was made to put his hand into it. If the snake bit him, he was guilty and the problem of punishing him got neatly solved in this method. To the snake was ascribed the wisdom to assess the guilt or innocence of a person.

In the court on the appointed day, the king shocked everyone by proclaiming that it was needless to ask every devotee to put his hand into the pot and that as he represented them all, he would do so in their place. And without further ado, he boldly inserted his hand in the pot. The snake did not bite him and the ministers, now thoroughly repentant, came up to the king and confessed to their guilt and their conspiracy. The hold of the devotees over the king naturally increased after this incident.

Kulacēkarar's poetic abilities are of a high order; his decade expressing his desire to be born as a fish in Tirumalai or as a bush or as the path or as something in that sacred mountain is justly famous. A point was made, while discussing Saiva Saint-minstrels, how at the highest level of the evolution of devotion, devotees declare they would continue to serve and love the Lord, whatever the way He treated them. Kulacēkarar has sung a '*patikam*' addressed to the Lord enshrined at Vittuvakkōṭu in the Cēra country giving expression to the same elevated sentiment with the help of nine wonderfully evocative similes. For instance, he says he would continue to love him despite all the troubles He visits on him even as a child continues to look up to the mother though she rejects him (presumably on account of some pressures on her). Another analogy is the patient continuing to love and respect the surgeon that cuts and burns him (for asepsis). Through such similes the poet teaches the great spiritual truth that the troubles we suffer are intended to ennoble us; they are not obstacles but serve as a great help in the onward march of man.

Three lesser Āḻvārs

Vippiranārāyaṇar, after severe tribulations blossoms out as an Āḻvār with the humble name 'Toṇṭar Aṭippoṭi' (meaning the dust under the feet of the Lord's devotees). He was wholely taken up with Raṅkanātar of Srīraṅkam and sang two *Pirapantams* on Him. One, Tirumalai, describes his own experiences in his spiritual

career. The other is a new genre, sung to awaken the Lord in the morning. The opportunity is used to describe the effects of dawn on the various fauna and on men and to implore the Lord to get up and give darsan to the devotees thronging eagerly for it. The literary quality of his poems is not very high.

There are two Āḻvārs of low birth, Tirumaḻicai and Tiruppāṇ . The former was a scholar who was highly regarded in the Vaiṇava world of his day. He wrote a fair number of hymns whose religious value far outstrips their literary value. The latter was a totally devoted, humble votary of the Lord of Srirańkam whose method of worship was to sing His praise, accompanying the singing with strummings on the flute he always carried. A legend makes the chief brahmin priest of the famous temple carry the humble devotee of low birth on his back all the way to the sanctum sanctorum where the Āḻvārs sang ten verses describing the physical beauty of the Lord and got absorbed in Him, with no time left to compose the 11th stanza, the customary '*kaṭaikkāppu*' where the benefits accurable from a recitation of the decad are listed. Though unsophisticated and with no apparent training or practice in literary exercise, Tiruppāṇāḻvār's decade of hymns is as high in literary worth as in religious value.

We have two more Āḻvārs to deal with but as they are of great importance and their work, of considerable significance, we have to stay with them for a certain time.

Tirumańkai Āḻvār

Tirumańkai Āḻvār was the chieftain of a principality in the Cōḻa country and was happily married to a pious lady who is reputed to have converted her hedonistically inclined husband to religious ways. The convert became zealously attached to Tirumāl and slowly gave up all worldly attachment so that he might follow the life of a vagrant minstrel. He got a special kind of initiation from the Lord at Tiruvāli

Tirunakari and became a full-fledged saint filling his heart to over flowing with a love of God to the exclusion of all else. Unfortunately there are a number of stories current about this great saint, that reflect little credit on him, that obviously must be untrue. What is clearly true is that Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār was a person of the highest sincerity and devotion to God who had great gifts of poesy with which he could serve his God with distinction.

In the first '*patikam*' he sang, he describes his own tribulations for long years till he learnt the sacred syllables, the eight-letter *mantiram* taught by the Lord himself. He describes this *mantiram* as more loving and considerate than the mother that bore him, as the one that brings triumph in all walks of life and wealth and status and even high-birth and crushes to smithereens all the troubles that beset a servant of God and eventually earns for the chanter everlasting beatitude.

This Āḻvār composed the largest number of '*pirapantams*', six in number, of which the *'Periya Tirumoḻi, '* as the name implies is far and away the biggest, with over a thousand stanzas in it. Being a gifted poet with a great command over the metres and skilled in composing tricky stanzas of the *cittirakkāviyam* type, his poetry enthrals the reader with vivid descriptions of the many places where the Lord is enshrined, mainly through dexterous use of the wonderfully delicate modes of love developed by the *Caṅkam* poets.

We shall first enjoy a stanza out of a *Patikam* sung on the Lord enshrined at Iṭaventai. This is set in the words of the mother of a love-lorn girl (who is none else than the Āḻvār himself) expressive of her anxiety at what she regards as a hopeless love of her daughter for the Lord:

She does not bless her playmates with
Her dazzling silvern smile.
She wears no paste of sandal on

Her strident pair of breasts.
She does not paint her eyes with unguent,
No flowers on her hair.
On her lips are ever the words
"Mal who strode the earth
The wide earth girt by the billowy sea
In but a single step!"
My stripling daughter spends her time
Lisping the names of the Lord!"
What fate have you in store for her
O Lord of Itaventai?

\- *Periyatirumoḻi II-7-2*

(37)

In Srirankam, the Āḻvār sings many decades, in one of which he remembers Rāma's great consideration for Kukaṉ who was low-born, who was outside the pale of Aryan society. The Āḻvār says feelingly, "You did not stop with merely stating that Ilatcumaṇaṉ was Kukaṉ's brother and Citai, a friend to him; you had to go ahead and say specifically, you are my dear friend'! These words have rung true through the corridors of time to assure me that low though I am, unfit though I shall ever be to receive your grace, I too shall be blessed!"

Here we have another stanza cast in the madhura bhava (man-to-woman love) where all the old conventions are brought into use. This is the utterance of the girl herself whose love for the Lord of Kuṟuṅkuṭi has debilitated her to the point when no other remedy proves of any value and she pleads with her friends to take her to the shrine and leave her there:

The bells that tinkle on the bulls
The flute that the cowherd plays
The southern breeze, the eventide

And the lovely moon it brings
Were pleasant to me in days of yore.
But not today; for friends,
They torture me to near death.
There seems no cure in sight.
Will you kindly transport me
If you do love me still,
To where the Lord of dusky hue
In Kuṟuṅkuṭi does dwell?

Periyatirumoḻi IX-5-5 (38)

Though at his best in singing of the man-to-woman love (which has earned for the Āḻvār the special name of Parakāla Nāyāki) he can sing, as Periyāḻvār did, putting himself in the role of Yacōta. Let us sample a verse which brings out all Krishna's naughtiness and all Yacōta's love for him despite this:

You don't do the things
That boys do often do;
You're a powerful speaker.
You've guile in your heart concealed.
And not in secrecy
But openly you do
The things that are forbidden.
At such your behaviour.
And the taunts others hurl
My heart melts to fluid.
Do not feign, my own.
Do not pretend to sleep!
Run up to mother, darling
To savour milky nectar!

- *Periyatirumoḻi* X-4-6 (39)

Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār has composed a *Tirukkuṟuntāṇṭakam* which is not particularly noteworthy. But his *Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam* has justifiably earned for him great adulation. This merits classification as a separate genre on account of the organic unity of all the 30 stanzas. It is divided into 3 tens; the first ten are addressed by the Āḻvār speaking in his own personality; the next ten are the words of Āḻvār's (the nāyakī's) mother and the last ten constitutes the version of Parakāla Nāyaki, herself. The poem makes dexterous use of the *Caṅkam* conventions; the verbal images and the poet's adroitness in handling this long and intractable metre combine to make it one of the enduringly great love poems in Bhakti literature. Let us capture some part of the pleasure through a translation of a stanza taken from the last decade:

He came to me with his dusky tuft of hair
Oscillating at his back, his wondrous rings
Worn in the ears scattering lustre as they moved
About his cheeks. He came to me accompanied
By no one but his bow and stood before me, dear!
Every part of his body looked like lotus fully bloomed,
His hands and feet, his mouth, his glorious eyes.
I saw his wondrous form before me standing
Alas, my dear, a panic fear burgeoned through my frame
That the one before me was not human, he, in fact is God,
God from the heaven, the panic rubbing out
My sense of delectation, the bliss of the priceless moment.

\- *Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam* - 21

(40)

The Āḻvār has composed three more *pirapantams* of which two are elaborations of the concept of *maṭal*. The old convention was that when the lover did not get much encouragement from the girl he loved, he got on the back of a horse made of palm leaves and went round the town to obtain the sympathy of the town people and

thus exercise pressure on the girl. The Āḻvār turned this convention inside out and presented the concept of the girl (i.e himself as Parakāla Nāyaki) getting on the back of the palm leaf horse to exercise pressure on the Lord to accept her. He is criticised by the grammarians for his change in the conventions he has introduced. The old Tamil conventions are all based on a superior position being accorded to the girl for winning whose favour the boy toils hard. The Āḻvār clearly felt that as the Lord is much superior to any human, the convention must be changed to suit this new situation. However it is a little offensive to our sense of propriety that a girl should go round the city streets seated on a prickly palm-bark horse. In any case these two *Pirapantams* of the Āḻvār are the least important of his works; they do not add anything to the fame built up on the basis of his *Periya Tirumoḻi.*

Nor does the sixth work of his add anything to his reputation. It is a very artificial *cittirakkāviyam* involving the numbers 1 to 7 used in the ascending and descending order in the verse, called *Eḻukūṟṟirukkai*, a genre in which Campantar too composed a poem. Neither is of any importance whatsoever, considered either as a Bhakti offering or as a literary work.

Nammāḻvār

We now come to the four works of Nammāḻvār, universally regarded as the greatest of the Āḻvārs. This title of being the greatest has been won by him wholly on grounds of his un-assailed leadership in the religious field; considered from the literary viewpoint, Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār and Āṇṭāḷ must be placed higher in the hierarchy. This is not to deny the obvious merits of Nammāḻvār's poetry; if sentiment is the prime-most ingredient of poetry, Nammāḻvār puts an excess of this vital component into his utterances. He, too, like Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār makes excellent use of the many delicate devices honed to perfection by the *Caṅkam akam* poets. He uses nature to

advantage in providing evocative backdrops to his word-portraits. His defects are a somewhat weak diction tending to localism and colloquial usages, a tendency to use the same word at the beginning of every line rather than words having assonance as other poets do, an excessive use of sentiment overflowing the limits set by art and a monotony of concepts and sentiment. He lacks Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's deep poetic insight and Āṇṭāḷs wonderful diction; both these later are more interesting to read than Nammāḻvār and this is the acid test of greatness in creative literature.

Yet Nammāḻvār has to be studied in some depth on account of the tremendous hold he has over the devotees of Tirumāl (one of whom exclaimed to the present writer during the course of a meeting on Nammāḻvār that he must surely be the greatest poet in the Tamil language!) and the many stanzas of undoubted merit in his *Tiruvāymoḻi*.

As a girl, love-lorn and unable to get requited, owing to the neglect of the Lord, Nammāḻvār (as Parāṅkuca Nāyaki) sends all kinds of birds to Him as her messengers of love. A stanza where she sends the "makaṉṟil birds", famous for their wonderful capacity for love for each other is interesting by itself and more significant for the brilliant commentary on it. The verse is as follows:

O makaṉṟilbirds, blue-tinted, the Lord
Feels no pity even on noticing
My debilitation, my pale-green skin.
What message can I now through you send
To such an one without compassion!
You still may see him and tell him that
The girl who loves him cannot now last
Much longer without a word of love
From him to her. Will you take the message
O makaṉṟil birds, or will you not?

-Tiruvāymoḻi I-4-4 (41)

The debilitation and the skin changing colour are traditionally the results of separation and a love-lorn girl. But they disappear the moment the lover comes back to her. Now the commentator asks the question, "How can there be these signs of distress when the Lord is with her; the poet uses the word 'noticing', making it clear that He is physically present. He should have used the words 'on hearing of your debilitation'! Has the poet committed an error here?" and answers, in a tour de force of brilliance, frequently seen in the commentary that true love can bring on such signs of weakness on a girl except when the lover is in tight embrace with her. He quotes the poem from *Kuruntokai* where the poet Paraṇar says the *pallōr* comes on the moment the lover leaves off embracing the girl (*Kuruntokai* 399) and from *Tirukkuṟaḷ* (where Vaḷḷuvar asserts that when the lover moves a little during embrace in bed, the parts of the body of the girl not covered by him turn pale.) There are many similar flashes of brilliant sophistry in the commentary that raise the level of the poem itself, though it is difficult to say whether the poet intended all those nuances and subtleties pointed out by the commentator.

Here is a stanza not on the madhura bhava, but rather typical of the Āḻvār and well constructed:

He never sought my acceptance,
He drove in and owned me all,
He merged my soul in His,
Will he leave me, denying Bliss?

\- *Tiruvāymoḻi I-7-7* (42)

Another stanza where the Āḻvār expresses indifference to his spiritual destiny - be it hell or heaven - so long as he can transport himself with the remembrance of the many incarnations of the Lord Who is birthless can also be quoted here:

Whether I gain heaven
Or reach the darkened hell,
O, merciful Lord
Give me the will
To intensely remember
All your incarnations-
Never to forget you
But ever delight in your deeds.
- Tiruvāymoḻi II-9-5 (43)

Let us now enjoy a stanza in a decade wholly devoted to expressing the mother's solicitude for her daughter, Parāṅkuca Nāyaki whose love for the Lord is making her almost mad:

Ye bangled belles!
See my daughter
Frisking to and fro,
Digging the earth and cry:
"My lord came as a boar
To rescue worlds of lore".
She scans the skies
And shrieks: "My Lord there resides"!
And shedding tears screams;
"My Lord is couched in seas
Beyond earth's boundaries" !
How to relieve my belle
From godly-maddened spell?
- Tiruvāymoḻi IV-4-1 (44)

Let us conclude with yet another stanza on a mother's lament taken from a decade (VII-2) where the Āḻvār reaches great heights of poesy.

My daughter grieves,
Shedding bucketful of tears:

"The wheel beckons me," she cries,
"His eyes are lotus flowers".
She cries and pitifully moans
Her separation from Lord:
God! What have you planned
To see her agony end?
- Tiruvāymoḻi VII-2-1 (45)

The Āḻvār has composed three other '*pirapantams*' out of which the one that needs a little attention is the *Tiruviruttam*, a work of a hundred stanzas rather like the *kōvais* of a later day where the many modes of a love-lorn lady are presented, exploiting all the *akam* conventions of the *Caṅkam* era. Here the Āḻvār shows a good command over the metre and grasp of the nuances that distinguish mode from mode and his diction, too, is happy. The *Periyatiruvantāti* and '*Tiruvāciriyam*' are of a routine nature, the latter cast in the *Aciriyappā* of *Caṅkam* days in which the Āḻvār is decidedly less at home.

There is a legend that the hymns of the Āḻvārs were lost and regained only through the determined efforts of an Acharya, Nātamuṉi who was a gifted singer who set them all to music. Now the musical notation has been wholly lost and groups recite the '*pirapantam*' at temples and during processions of icons in a prosaic manner. *Tēvāram paṇs* are still being used and there is a strict convention that *Tēvāram* hymns should not be sung otherwise than in these *paṇs*. Their musical quality which is highly pleasing is thus retained but at the cost of a wide dissemination of the works themselves. Vaiṇava *pirapantams* are widely chanted as no musical ability is needed to chant them in the way it is done now, but that way the musical quality is lost. It is supposed that one cannot have it both ways.

Māṇikkavācakar

Tiruvācakam and *Tirukkōvaiyār* composed by Māṇikkavācakar are hymns on Siva which have attained great popularity with the

devotees on account of their melting Bhakti content. The passage discussing them should properly have found a place after that dealing with the Saiva *Tirumuṟaikaḷ* but as their date is very much under debate and in any case they appear to be later to the *Tēvāram* and *Tivviyap Pirapantam*, they are being dealt with here. Some thinkers ascribe Māṇikkavācakar to the eighth century A. D. This would be difficult to support as Cēkkiḻār who flourished in the 11th-12th centuries and wrote about all major and even minor saints is silent about him. This is quite a conclusive piece of evidence that Māṇikkavācakar was a saint-minstrel of much later date than the 8th century, later, indeed than the 12th century. The scholars who advocate the earlier date point to the fact that his *Tiruvempāvai* verses are sung in the Far East (in a mutilated manner) from very early days. However, as the time when these songs travelled the seas to these distant countries cannot be fixed with any degree of accuracy, this is not a reliable piece of evidence on which to base the date when Māṇikkavāca kar flourished. It is felt that it may be much safer to ascribe him to the second part of the 12th century, after Cēkkiḻār.

There are 650, hymns in *Tiruvācakam*, mostly organised as *patikams*; the notable exception is the *Tiruccatakam* which is not in the *viruttam* metres adopted in the rest of the work but in *āciriyappā* and thus constitutes a long poem. The *kōvai* work consists of 400 stanzas using the 400 modes of akam recognized by later rhetoricians. The notable feature of all the hymns of Māṇikkavācakar is their high emotional content which has attracted devotees to them and which has earned for them a high place in hymnist literature. Judged purely as literature, however, they do not rank very high. The sensitive regard for nature and its dexterous use to evoke the proper sentiment which we see in the *Tēvāram* are not to be found in these works. Māṇikkavācakar displays little of the creative imagination and the rich poetic diction which mark the work of the Saiva Trinity. He displays the ultimate limit of the tendency to pour

pathos and self-denigration into Bhakti composition without regard to the upper limit for the portrayal of sentiments set by the exigencies of the literary art.

Literary judgment is largely subjective and what has been stated above is only the present writer's subjective opinion. He realises, too, that he is in a minuscule minority. For, whole books have been written in Tamil eulogising *Tiruvācakam* as great literature, without even stating the criteria by which the work has been assessed. Rattiṉa Navarattiṉam's work in English is very different from the common run; for in it the basic literary concepts of the Tamil land as well as those in Sanskrit have been stated; but the author has no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the *Tiruvācakam* stands unchallenged as one of the finest gems of poetry in the literature of the world. Tastes must vary indeed over a very wide range spectrum.

A major miracle reported in the life of Māṇikkavācakar is the one connected with the commission of the king under whom he served as minister, to buy horses for the royal cavalry. The saint spent all the King's money in repairing and renovating the Lord's temple and the king angry at this, imprisoned his minister. But the Lord converted all the jackals of the area into horses and the king was convinced for the moment. But in His inscrutable way, He converted the horses back into jackals which ran away howling. The minister left the king's service eventually and started his full time ministry as a saint of God. He had the distinction of having the Lord himself as his preceptor. The sacred place where he received his initiation from the Lord was Tirupperunturai in the Cōḻa country.

The central plank of this saint-minstrel's teaching is that though we are all unworthy, we may yet redeem ourselves by weeping tears of penitence and of love. Let us hear his own words affirming this:

False is the play of my heart and my mind too.
False alas, is my love and that springs from it.
If I shed tear drops in weeping remorseful anguish,
Shall I not win thy compassionate grace?
Essence of sweetness, freshness, gladness mellifluous,
Dear Lord! perfect my love and draw me in Grace to Thee,

- 5. 9. 90 (46)

His own utter worthlessness is a repeated refrain as also God's grace that fell undeservedly on him. This repetition of his own worthlessness may be good in theology as indicating total freedom from egotism; but it does not make pleasant reading. There is also this to be said against it that man's inner worth and dignity are totally ignored in such asseverations and the very basis of man's endeavour and singular triumphs in the last 20,000 years of civilization knocked out. Another example of the same theme is furnished here:

Though not deemed fit for the bliss of realisation,
Though cloaked in unreal vesture and egotistic vanities,
When Thou bad'st me come with loving glance
My afflictions ceased; yet deceit now seemed truth.
And yet I perished not, Oh blooming Lotus Foot!
- 5 10. 93 (47)

The bliss of the liberated men who continue to live in the world on account of the 'prarabda' (sins of previous births) is described in a verse which is joyful in contrast with the unremitting melancholy of most of the work:

They sport in merry laughter, revel in glee;
They come together in advaitic unison,
And chant, praise and expound Thy holy word.
They retire alone to contemplate on Thy holy name.
They adore Thee as their Beloved Lord

Who holds His blissful dance at the golden Hall."
-21.9 (48)

The saint sings in triumphant joy in the *Piṭittappattu* exclaiming that he had caught Him securely and asking how He could expect to escape from him now. A stanza from this decade:

"Whatever false forms I espouse,
However beguiled I become,
My light of Truth, Supreme Lord of Gods!
That I may not sink in the gloom
So abysmal, oh, ocean of Love,
I cling to Thee for ever and ever.
Wherefore can'st Thou sever from me now?"
- 37. 2. (49)

As Mu, Varatarācaṉ points out, Māṇikkavācakar has taken up themes and forms from folklore and composed some hymns which would appeal to the less sophisticated among his readers. These include the *ammāṉ* (here girls sit and play with dried berries), the *poṟcuṇṇam* (where girls grind a perfumed powder used in bathing) and the *Ūcal* (where girl sit and oscillate in the swing), all these activities being accompanied by song.

Let us conclude this part with a stanza taken from near the end of the work where he reports with spiritual repletion:

Long I strove with the ignoramus, dense of Truth,
Till He opened the vista of Love: my ills of yore
And bonds that beguiled the mind, He reft asunder.
Thus My Father transmuted me into His likeness-
Ah! who would gain His Grace in this measure?
Salutation in wonderment!"
- 51. 1. (50)

The patikam as the unit

The entire Bhakti literature of this period whether Saiva or Vaiṇava was cast in the *patikam* mould. Hence in a study of genres,

it is quite necessary and profitable to study this unit called *patikam* which has given the hymnal literature in Tamil its peculiar flavour.

Ten is a number that comes naturally to man without regard to his basic culture or milieu. This is because he has ten fingers, taking both the hands together; and from immemorial times, he has been using them to help him to count.

So, traditionally ten has been the favoured figure among all men in all societies. The Indians taught the world an easy way of computing by taking ten as the base. This was the inspiration for the launching of the decimal system. All the big figures like a lakh, a crore, a million, an aṟputa, a caṅka, a padma are all multiples of ten. We can multiply instances like this which all go to indicate how the ten fingers in a man's hands have provided him with a standard aid in counting.

So, naturally ten was accepted very early as a measure in literature, too. We have the *Patiṟṟuppattu*, (ten times ten) of the *Caṅkam* period as the earliest instance of using ten as a unit for a collection of verses. *Pattuppāṭṭu* is a little different as the songs involved here are comparatively long and the name refers rather to an anthology than to a working unit of collection. In the *Ainkuṟunūṟu* we have five major units of a hundred songs each (the earliest instance of a *Catakam*, a century of songs, much in favour in the second millennium after Christ), and each hundred consists of ten decades.

It was Kāraikkāl ammaiyār who brought the decade into use for the first time in hymnal literature. We have already seen how she composed the *Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu Mūttatiruppatikam*. After her the Nāyaṉmār and the Āḻvārs used the decade as the universal unit of their compositions, with the exception of a very small number of works like *Eḻukūṟṟirukkai* and the few works in *āciriyappā* . As we have seen, the decade is a conveniently handy unit and while they could use one decade to panegyrise the Lord in a small temple, they could sing several decades in praise of the Lord at Citamparam or Srirankam.

Further, the author-poets do not have a story to tell, as in the case of epics. Hence ten verses as a unit need not function as too shackling a limit and the matter need never spill over to the next decade.

The stanzas in a decade will be found to have the last line recurring as the refrain. In some cases, where the name of the holy place is too long to be accommodated in a single line it would be found that a part of the third line along with the fourth line recurs as the refrain. In the cases of Campantar, two features can be discovered in his arrangement of the matter; in the eighth verse of almost every decade, there is a reference to Rāvanan̲ and in the tenth, the Jains and the Buddhists are referred to with disapproval. In the case of all the Nāyan̲mār and the Āl̲vārs, the last verse is used to point to the many benefits, material and spiritual which the devotee is assured of acquiring on chanting the decade. The remarkable exception is the single decade composed by Tiruppāṇāl̲var; the absence is explained stating that the Āl̲vār could not see or think of anything else except the form of Raṅkanātar and hence he could not detach himself from such contemplation even for a moment to compose the last verse listing the benefits. The support for this idea is in the very last line composed by the Āl̲vār:

My eyes that have seen
The form of the Lord here
Can never again rest
On anything else here. (51)

The verses in a decade are not found to follow any particular sequence of ideas. They are spontaneous utterances from the cultivated lips of saints who became filled with ecstasy in front of the Lord's linga or icon; hence there cannot be any studied order of ideas in them, nor any cut-and-dried plan or design. Many concepts are repeated in the verses in a decade; particularly if one notable event had happened in that holy place, or the services of a saintly devotee are associated with it, that event or devotee would

find a mention in many of the verses. In the decade sung at Mylapore by Campantar to raise Pūmpāvai from the dead, the functions held in the temple every month are described, one to each stanza; hence there is a very definite order to the verses in this decad. In Nammāḻvār's hymns, there is an artificial order imposed by beginning every verse with the word with which the previous one ended; this facilitates greatly the chanting of the verses (in temples, as is done even today) from memory. This is known as the *antāti* order, much favoured in later-day poetry.

To sum up it can be stated that as a genre, the decade as the unit is most handy and flexible for the purpose for which it is intended, easy for the saint to compose and easy for the devotees to memorise and sing. The great popularity of the Saiva and Vaiṇava hymns is at least in part owing to the convenient form, the decade, in which they have been presented.

Islamic and Christian hymns

At the time Islam came to the Tamil land, the literary world was dominated by *kāppiyams* and hence pious Tamil Muslim poets wrote *kāppiyams* like the *Ciṟāppurāṇam.* Likewise Christians too wrote *kāppiyams* earlier than hymns. But both these religious groups turned to the genre of hymns at a certain stage and very stirring poems of praise were composed. Kuṇaṅkuṭi Mastāṉ Sultan Abdul Kadir) of the late 18th and early 19th centuries is the most famous of the Muslim devotional poets. He sang like the Siddhas in a mystical-philosophical vein. He was a sufi and as is seen among other sufis too, his was a cosmopolitan, catholic kind of piety that was not bigoted; for this reason and on account of the basic worth of the poems, they are read by Hindus too. It is to be noted that two Hindu poets have composed works eulogising Mastāṉ. There can be no doubt that he comes in the long line of enlightened Siddhas, whatever the form of religion he practised. Mastāṉ's songs are full of authentic subjective experiences; he sang of what he felt at the

deepest level of his soul and this enhances the value of his work as an authentic personal document of an emancipated mystic.

Another noted sufi singer was Pīr Mukammatu Appā of the 17th century. His works all have the word Ñānam in their titles. Other Muslim singers of note are Kavikkaḷañciyappulavar , Piccai Iprākim pulavar and Ceykutampippāvalar. They all show the influence of Hindu hymnists like Aruṇakirinātar, Tāyumāṉavar and Paṭṭiṉattar. A sincere devotion and a strong condemnation of the attractions of the world like wealth and women are characteristic features of Muslim hymnal poetry. Stylistically, they delighted in sound effects and the double entendre just like the Hindu poets of that age.

The first Tamil Christian hymns were composed by Vīramāmuṉivar an Italian priest; *Karuṇāmparappatikam* and *Tēvāram* were the names by which his hymns were known. Henry A. Krishna Pillai, the celebrated author of *Iraṭcaṇiya yāttirikam* composed some hymns which, too, he called by the name *Tēvāram* . Munsiff Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai and Vētanāyaka Sastri too composed hymns with a Christian flavour. Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai had a catholic view of religion and his poems breathe an air of tolerance. Vētanāyaka Sastri composed a number of minor *pirapantams* which will be discussed in the chapter devoted to them.

Chapter Five

THE MAJOR LATER EPICS

In a work which sets out to examine literary genres, normally the question whether a work is Hindu or Jain should not matter unless the religious tone of the work is such that it creates a new genre. Here, in this work we have discussed the non-Hindu epics in one chapter and we propose to discuss the Hindu epics in another. It is not on account of a new genre having been created by the Hindu poets who largely carried on the literary traditions of the non-Hindu epics intact. The reason why we interposed a chapter on the religious hymns between the parts where we discussed Jain and propose to discuss Hindu epics is two-fold.

The more important reason is that the Hindu epics were profoundly influenced, if not from the view point of genre, certainly by the teachings of the Nāyaṉmār and the Āḻvārs. It is even possible to conjecture that the Hindu epics may not have been composed at all, had it not been for the tremendous popular movement stimulated by these saint-minstrels bringing to the centre of the stage the Bhakti way of worship. Besides the inspiration, Kampaṉ took a number of concepts and in places even words and phrases from the Āḻvārs' *pirapantams*, while Cēkkiḻāṉ makes these saint-minstrels the dramatis personae of his unique epic, quoting extensively from their works.

The second reason is that though we are examining literary genres, a chronological order is being maintained in order to allow a picture of the evolution in time of the genres to be formed in the reader's mind. New genres are forged out, sometimes, on account of the caprice of a poet, but mostly for reasons which have to do with the nature of the subject matter and the atmosphere surrounding the composition; the latter is very much a product of the time. Of

course there are other reasons at work than the time at which the compositions are made. If the saint-minstrels preferred to compose *patikams*, it was not in exercise of a whim but because musical compositions intended to be sung by the multitude had, perforce, to be short; and as temples of very different levels of importance were involved, it was advisable to have a small, handy unit (of ten stanzas). While on Vaṭatirumullaivāyil, one *patikam* would suffice, a number of *patikams* could be sung on Citamparam and Tiruvīḻimiḻalai. However it is most desirable to have at the back of our minds a time-frame to refer to and the arrangements now adopted, it is hoped, will help the reader to build up for himself such a useful time-frame of reference.

Kampaṉ's Immortal Classic

Now with considerable pleasure we turn to a discussion of Kampaṉ, the king of Tamil poets. As a literature composed over a period, the *Caṅkam* lyrics rank very high; indeed, there has never been such a productive period in the Tamil land and outside it, anywhere in the world, too, as the *Caṅkam* era. But if you have to name a single poet, Kampaṉ must be given the mantle, the crown of wild olives, the trophy due to the champion. *Caṅkam* love lyrics certainly rank as the greatest pure literature, but, as we have seen, pure literature without the adjuncts of story and characterization and a strong religious element running through the work does not appeal to the people; the Tamils, it must be said to their discredit, ignored this glorious pure literature composed by the *Caṅkam* poets and it was all but lost entirely owing to their callous neglect of a precious heritage. Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam*, besides being great poetry has a great story (the greatest story in the world in the opinion of A. W. Ryder of the University of California at Berkeley) and memorable characters and a strong religious element running through it. Such a combination is certain to appeal to a wide variety of readers and Kampaṉ's classic is not likely to be neglected by the Tamils. Indeed,

in the last 50 years Kampaṉ Kaḻakams (academics) have been started in all major centres and there is a real resurgence of interest in his immortal poem.

Kampaṉ is reputed to have composed three or four minor works; his authorship of these cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt; and his fame depends, not a whit on them, it is so securely built on his *Rāmāyaṇam*. Little that is reliable is known about this, the tallest figure in Tamil literature. Even his name does not appear to be the one he was christened with, it may be a caste name or an appellation or title given to him later on. It is generally assumed that he was born in Cōḻa country near Mayilāṭuturai and died in Pāṇṭiya country at a place called Nāṭṭaracaṉkōṭṭai where there is a mausoleum for him. He seems to have received the patronage of one Caṭaiyappa Vaḷḷal and the grateful poet remembers his patron at regular points in his classic. Where and under whom he studied, how he attained such mastery over the language and the metres and the art of poetry are all unknown and perhaps will remain so till the end of time. It is a great pity that Indians who so love and cherish their literature are so indifferent to the personality of their greatest poets.

There are two theories about when he flourished; one ascribes him to the ninth and the other to the 12th century. The later date seems more likely as Kampaṉ is clearly indebted to Tiruttakka Tēvar in the matter of handling *viruttams* and Tēvar himself is ascribed to the ninth century. Communication was not as it is today and one has to allow a century or two for the proper propagation of a literary work in those days. From the extent of the influence of Tēvar on Kampaṉ who even borrowed some peculiar expressions from his predecessor, one is inclined to accept the later date viz., 12th century for the author of the *Rāmāyaṇam*.

From this area of uncertainties we shall move on to the glorious land of enchantment, that is his poetry, where there

are no vagueries but only the sure touch of the master. Kampa<u>n</u> took the story and the main outlines of the character-traits of the principal personae from Vālmīki. It is very wrong, however, to call Kampa<u>n</u>'s work a translation. He took the basic ideas from Sanskrit and wove his own tapestry with many wonderful innovations which add splendour to the work.

Vālmīki and Kampa<u>n</u>

While Vālmīki was a most sincere chronicler of the events, Kampa<u>n</u> was a great poet who gave an aesthetic shape to the story. It is true that a later poet enjoys an advantage over the pioneer precisely because he has the earlier poet's work before him. But, after an acquaintance (mostly in translation) with the works of other post-Vālmīki writers on the *Rāmāyaṇa* like Tuḷacitācar and Kiruttivācar, one begins to doubt whether this chronological factor does really confer any sizeable advantage in the absence of talent. Later writers are tempted to ring changes in the Rāma story, led away by mere caprice; and many of these changes are so inapt, so subversive of the main planks of characterization and general trend of the story that the whole work is warped by them. Kampa<u>n</u>'s changes in the story were rendered necessary by the great changes in time and social concepts and the literary climate; none is owing to mere caprice and a desire to show off his originality; and all of them are appropriate and they add to the quality of the work. Kampa<u>n</u> is great and his work is an immortal classic not because he came after Vālmīki but because of his matchless calibre and his unique gift of poesy. It is not the time or the epoch that gives birth to genius nor is it governed by any law; or perhaps the law governing it has not yet been discovered.

Kampa<u>n</u>'s character portraits

The first great quality of Kampa<u>n</u> as an epic poet is his phenomenal ability at characterization. We saw how in this field none

of the epic poets before him (and practically none after him) showed any notable aptitude. Kampaṉ took the outlines of the portraits from Vālmīki but breathed his own genius into them. Indeed by reference only to this field, one can demonstrate how little Kampaṉ owes to his predecessor and how much to his creative power. Characters like Kukaṉ and Kumpakarṇaṉ, very lightly sketched by the Sanskrit poet have acquired memorable characteristics at the hands of Kampaṉ and have come out, throbbing with life. Both Kumpakarṇaṉ and Vipīṭaṇaṉ condemn the kidnapping of Citai but, look at the very different mental and moral positions from which these brothers view the problem! The younger brother advocates the return of Citai saying it is immoral to covet another's wife, pointing out that only that way the country and the 'raksasa' clan could be saved from destruction:

To prevent us and our relatives
In infamy and disgrace dying;
To the ruin of our fame and fortune
And the honour of our high birth,
I pray thee release
The goddess of chastity;
Than this there's nothing
That'll bring thee victory !

[6169] (1)

But Kumpakarṇaṉ as a warrior and a man of spirit who also sees the immorality of Rāvaṇaṉ's action, advocates war where all of them 'raksasas' are sure to be destroyed. Breathing sneering contempt in the lines

We long for unsullied fame;
We talk loudly of honour;

But we nourish lust in our bosom
And we seize and keep as prisoner
Another's pure, virtuous wife!
And from the men we shrink!
Isn't our valour great?

[6122] (2)

he counsels war, stating that it would be wrong if Cītai is returned at that stage, for they would be the universal objects of derision.

What thou hast done
Is not the action of the great
But only that which hath
Our race degraded!
Still, if we were to release Cītai now,
We'd be the laughing-stock
Of the world. It is far better
To fight and die
By the enemy's hand!

[6123] (3)

Kampan̲ took Vālmīki's character-portrait of Paratan̲ and improved upon it producing an extremely credible and homogeneous painting. His righteous indignation is roused to the highest pitch when he learns of the perfidy of his mother Kaikēyi, resulting in Rāma being banished to the forests. He cries out in a paroxysm of rage,

Thou sayest my father is dead
And my brother is living in the forest,
And all this is thy doing!
Oh! That I should have heard thee say this

And not torn thy tongue out; I'm indeed
The man that coveted the throne!

[2172] (4)

Paratan̲ in the next verse, says he would have killed his mother who had plotted to put him on the throne but for the fear that Rāma would never forgive him-Rāma whom she had so badly wronged ! What a dizzy height of morality and selfless nobility the characters of the *Rāmāyaṇam* climb to, with apparent ease!.

Rāma understands Paratan̲ better than Ilakkuvan̲ does. While the imperious younger brother plans to wipe out Paratan̲ and his army, Rāma points out all the noblest traits of Paratan̲ and adds that he will happily hand over the kingdom to whomever Rāma directs him to hand it over. And when Paratan̲ staggers in, his eyes streaming tears and falls at his feet, Rāma uses telling sarcasm to teach Ilakkuvan̲ in these words:

And Rāma observing this,
Turns round to Ilakkuvan̲,
And says, "Now observe closely
The martial array of Paratan̲
And his army!"

(-2424) (5)

At this stage the reader begins to nurse the feeling that Paratan̲ may be superior to Rāma himself. For what did Rāma forsake? He was *not* offered the kingdom, he was banished to the forests on the orders of his father. The only credit that can be claimed on Rāma's side is that he did not rebel against his father but went quietly; and he did not harbour malice against either Kaikēyi or Paratan̲. But

Paratan̲ was expected to be crowned king, even the priest and the ministers of Ayōttiyā asked him to ascend the throne and give a good government to the suffering country. He had the moral grit to refuse the offer; he actually went to the forests to seek out Rāma and make him king. This is the level of the reader reaction to which Kampan̲'s poetry pushes it up.

But the master will not allow the mistake of making his hero's character suffer by comparison with a lesser character. He will make Kukan̲ and even Kōcalai declare that Paratan̲ is greater than Rāma but he will not make such a statement himself; it will only be a character's version, the version of a highly emotionally charged character whose measuring rod for greatness is Rāma himself: Kampan̲ comes out with his own version of who is greater when he says

Deeply sighing, with tears cascading
Down his chest, with a melting heart,
He engulfed his brother in tight embrace;
It was as if compassion hugged
The moral law and rectitude.

[-2429] (6)

Paratan̲ was the embodiment of *a̲ram*, of the moral code and rectitude and propriety; but above all these rules of conduct reigns the ineffable quality of compassion which Rāma has in plentiful measure. This is where Rāma scores over everyone else, over even Paratan̲.

We see in many places how Kampan̲ establishes Rāma's superiority smoothly in the course of the narration, without appearing to interpose an idea not very relevant to the passage. In the portion where Rāma confers with his monkey-council on the question of whether to welcome Vipīṭaṇan̲ into his camp, the views of the monkey leaders are first unfolded; they are all against accepting him as they

feel he is the enemy's brother and can not therefore be trusted. Anuman disagrees with them all stating that he has seen Vipīṭaṇan conduct himself in a most praiseworthy manner in Rāvaṇan's court; he is a good person, ethical-minded and reliable and he is ambitious to ascend the Laṅkan throne; he can therefore be trusted. "He will be useful to our side with his knowledge of the enemy's strength and weakness. So we should welcome him to our camp" counsels Māruti. At this point one would think that there can only be two viewpoints in the matter and Rāma would accept Anuman's arguments and receive the 'raksasa' into his ranks.

But no ! Rāma raises the whole debate to a new and dizzying height where pure ethics rule, not selfish policy nor stratagems based on political theory. For Rāma says

What need is there to say more?
What Anuman hath
So convincingly said
Is the only right thing to do.
E'en if it were not so,
Whether we win or lose,
Is there any course left to us
But to accept him
Who our protection doth seek?

and in conclusion gives this, his final verdict:

Therefore, the moment
One cometh to me seeking refuge
It's my duty to give him
Abhaya danam - the gift
Of refuge then and there!

[120] (7)

During the course of his statement of his case, Rāma says death is preferable to a king rather than the refusal to grant asylum to one in trouble, quoting the example of Cipi who was prepared to die in order to protect the dove to which he had given promise to protection. "What is *a͟ram* worth", he demands to know, "if it does not urge on to help a person in distress, if one does not give what he has to a person in need, if one does not succour a person who seeks refuge in him?". He says towards the end that all those who counselled against and for his acceptance acted under the urge of their matchless love for him (Rāma) but it was his unvarying creed to offer refuge to a person seeking it and offer it without a moment's delay. The views of the other monkeys were not very wise or statesmanlike. The view expressed by Anuma͟n was based on a clear, intelligent appraisal of the position advocating the acceptance of Vipīṭaṇa͟n as it would be beneficial to Rāma; and Kampa͟n indicates this by using the epithet 'the thoughtful one' when referring to him. But Rāma is above intelligence, above all well planned out strategies; his decision is based on the eternal law of right conduct. Kampa͟n demonstrates Rāma's immeasurable superiority, not as one of degree but as one of a different kind altogether, over all his counsellors, over the superbly gifted Anuma͟n himself.

Five-in-one

We shall conclude this section on Kampa͟n's characterization with a remark on how quickly, in how short a space he can provide the major features of the profile of a personality. Poets need many stanzas to describe a single character and Kampa͟n can do this as well as the next man. But there is no parallel in all Tamil literature to this passage, a single stanza in the Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam where Parata͟n introduces Cumittirai to Kuka͟n; for in the course of this single stanza, he is able to provide the major outline of the profile of as many as five characters! The verse is the one with the running number 2369 and can be translated as here:

Then, pointing to the one that stood
As if embodying all aṟam in herself,
Pleaded Kuka, "Please introduce
This lady filled to the brim with love!"
Replied Parataṉ "Know her, Kuka,
To be the younger queen of the righteous king
Who gave up his life in establishing
Truth and rectitude; she also is
The mother of the one that followed Rāma
(The object of worship of everyone)
And thus established that there could be
A true brother too to the one banished!

(8)

It can be seen that in this single verse, Kampaṉ has adequately described Cumittirai (embodiment of *aṟam* and filled with love), Tacarataṉ (righteous king who gave up his life establishing truth and rectitude), Rāma (the object of worship of everyone) and Ilakkuvaṉ (the one that followed Rāma and thus established that there could be a true brother too to the one banished). We said there are five character sketches in this single verse. The fifth is that of Parataṉ, the narrator who, in the last four lines (of the translation) suggestively, through comparison, presents a disparaging picture of himself as the bad brother.

Kampaṉ is a born story-teller. He can keep up the interest of the reader by artistically anticipating certain later events, by asking rhetorical questions and by the ineffable device of suggestion. There can be little mystery in a story like Rāma's which has permeated the personality of the country for a hundred generations. But Kampaṉ's skill and craftsmanship keeps up the interest and one is impelled to read further on, even though it is quite a long epic.

His powers of description

Kampaṉ revels in detailed descriptions. In fact, this feature is often cited as a defect in him. For, witness his carrying on with apparently needless descriptions of the antics of Tacarataṉ's army when accompanying the king to the wedding of Rāma, in *Pālakāṇṭam*. A statistical - minded reader counted nearly 250 stanzas as digressive at this point. Why does a great poet like Kampaṉ do this? There are certain injunctions in *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* that the march of an army, drinking bouts and bathing scenes and water games should be described in a *kāppiyam*. Did Kampaṉ indulge in these long and tiresome descriptions only so that he may fulfil these mechanical conditions set in a work of grammar?

There is another longish passage where the same army marching is described; when Parataṉ proceeds to the forests to entreat Rāma to come back and get crowned King of Ayōttiyā, he takes the army with him. And Kampaṉ considers it necessary again to describe the march of the self-same army in a long passage. Kampaṉ's understanding of aesthetic requirements appears to us a little clouded at this stage.

But a careful examination of the two passages will reveal to the conscientious reader how subtly variant Kampaṉ has made these two passages. Though the same army is portrayed proceeding (to Mitilai, in the first case and to the forests in the second), the moods of the men and women and even the animals vary. In the first case, everyone appears affected by the spirit of the occasion and Cupid has a merry play creating havoc amongst them. Three passages will suffice to bring up the prevailing mood among the members of the army proceeding to attend the wedding in Mitilai.

A youth saw a maid with wavy tresses,
Feet like lotuses, dark eyes like spears,
and asked her, "You with your breasts adorned

And shoulders with long bands of gold,
Where did you, negligent, leave your waist?

-Verse 765 (9)

The women nestling joyously
Their breasts against the youths
Saw female bees from the trees
In buds which resembled their breasts
Mating with the male bees
From their own black hair

- *Verse 859* (10)

A spear-eyed woman whose husband was her life,
When her husband called her by her co-wife 's name,
Her pride offended and coming to a head,
Smell the flower in her hand which was scorched at once!

- *Verse 909* (11)

It is the same army and presumably the same persons (excepting for a few retirements and deaths and new recruits) that march with Paratan̲ to the forests. Even a cursory reading will show that something is amiss. A second and closer reading will reveal clearly how everyone in the army is saddened and in no mood for the love frolics that occupied their time in the earlier march. The two examples given indicate the trend of the whole passage:

"The prince has left; forswearing all
Ornaments, the goddess sitting
On a lotus flower now performs penance.
The god of love is steeped in misery".
The limitless army moved listless
Suggesting all this by its mood.

- *[2285]* (12)

The fire of anger 'gainst the queen
Kēkaya's daughter, fiercely burning
In the hearts of the women frightened away
The youths whose passion was roused by Cupid
Urging them in normal days
To embrace tight their burgeoning breasts.

- *(2294]* *(13)*

Clearly Kampaṉ made use of descriptive passages to reinforce the prevailing sentiment of that part of the work. This is a device that great poets have made use of in all languages. For, the heart of all creative art is the sentiment; and whatever material the poet may bring in from whichever field, be it astrology, yoga or moral aphorisms or descriptions of nature or of atmosphere should be calculated to enhance and enrich the sentiment. This idea with reference to descriptive passages has been fully worked out, for the first time, in the present author's work in Tamil *"Kampaṉ Kaṇṭa Kaḷaṉ"*; at the end of the work a theory has been developed on the use of descriptions in epic works. Even though Kampaṉ chose a large canvas to paint on, he was never lax in the use of words and stanzas, everyone of which had a purpose to fulfil in the general scheme of things. It is only the lesser poets who filled their works with pointless portraits full of plagiarised ideas.

His delineation of sentiment

A criterion to measure the greatness of a creative work recently developed in the present writer's Tamil work *"Caṅkappāṭṭil Poṅkum Uṇarcci"* (since issued in an English translation under the little "Fine Excess of Sentiment"), when applied to the *Rāmāyaṇam* of Kampaṉ reveals his poetic calibre. The criterion is based on the aesthetic theory that the level of portrayal of sentiment in any creative work should lie between two limits-one, the lower, representing the level met with in daily life and the other, the upper, beyond which

it becomes melodramatic, unrelishable and actually counter-productive.

It is easy enough to prove that Kampan' s portraiture of sentiment is never inadequate, it is always above the level at which characters in real life in comparable situations would be expected to express it. In epics composed in the olden days, poets were seldom guilty of under portrayal. The less the poetic calibre, the greater was the tendency to mix strong colours and daub them in heavy strokes with thick-bristled brushes. The test, therefore, lies in whether they show the necessary artistic restraint to keep their portraiture of sentiments below the ceiling.

It is not necessary merely to keep the level of the sentiment portraiture below the upper limit; the manner in which this restraint is exercised could be crude, contrived, artificial or natural and artistic. The way Kampan has managed it must be studied to see how delicately it is all done. It would be beyond the scope of this work to study the various ways in which Kampan keeps down the delineation of sentiment below the ceiling prescribed by art. We can begin to understand the scope of the problem before the poet and the inspired way he has gone about solving it by studying the portraiture of a sentiment in the *Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam.*

The *Kāṇṭam* selected is extremely significant for the sudden turn of events it portrays, for the drama it builds up, for the moral elevation displayed by more than one character in it. It starts on a happy note with Tacaratan deciding to crown Rāma prince, a decision received with tumultuous joy by the people. Real trouble starts in the second *paṭalam* at the 47th stanza which presents the hunchback maid-servant Mantarai. Her words initially have the opposite effect to what was intended, for Kaikēyi presents her with a jewel for having brought joyful tidings. Using excellent strategies based on psychology, Mantarai turns her mistress's joy into disappointment and anger and teaches her how to go about tackling the aged king.

The aged king is putty in Kaikēyi's hands and agrees to her demands though intensely anguished at the turn of events. His misery does not melt his young queen's heart, however, who insists on her pound of flesh. For a total of 94 stanzas this tension-filled drama with pathos dominating it unrolls itself, leaving the reader panting for breath. The delineation of pathos has reached a culmination and the sensitive reader can only take in that much and no more.

Kampa<u>n</u>'s sensitive antennae must have felt this and urged him to taper it off. But more sorrow has to follow and it would be most unnatural and against the run of the story to taper off this sentiment of pathos at this stage. The requirements of aesthetics urge him to introduce a scene of pleasure to compensate for the pathos so long delineated by injecting an opposite sentiment into the passage; and witness how naturally he injects this unlikely-looking opposite sentiment at this point.

Dark things are afoot in the palace in Ayōttiyā which shall have a shattering effect not only upon this country but on Sri Lanka too. But the people of Ayōttiyā that evening were filled with ecstatic joy that Rāma was to be crowned prince. No domestic celebration affecting their individual families would have brought so much pleasure to them as this, such was Rāma's hold over the hearts of his people. "This night that has interposed itself between us and the happy moment of Rāma's crowning, alas is lengthening itself into an epoch!" mused the citizens who saw the east reddening with the rising sun and jumped out of their beds in anticipated joy. "This is the day when we all shall really live, all other days we merely exist" each of them tells himself. The one thought in the minds of all the women was to see Rāma dressed in all the finery for the supreme occasion. Kampa<u>n</u> piles up picture after picture of the keenly anticipated joy of the citizens in as many as 57 stanzas only so that the pathos that had been allowed to surge to a crescendo can be countered to the

extent demanded by the exigencies of art. While reading this passage, the reader knows how all this anticipation of joy is going to turn out eventually but he is irresistibly carried on by the tide of popular enthusiasm.

In the latter part of this passage, the many details of the arrangements for the crowning are described and the assembling of the leading courtiers and the priests. When Kampa<u>n</u> feels that the pathos of the first part has been brought out a few notches and the reader is now not averse to fresh doses of tragic happenings, he bungs in the heartrending episode of Rāma being told the bad news by Kaikēyi who does not make any attempt to soften the blow ,who, in fact , derives a sadistic pleasure in hitting him on the head with the news of banishment. A long succession of unhappy events unroll themselves, a total of 329 stanzas in all. This is too much of an excess of sentiment it must be admitted. But compensatory elements are offered here and there for relief in the shape of Ilakkuva<u>n</u> and Citai offering to accompany Rāma and the wonderfully unflappable temperament Rāma displays during the whole unhappy chain of events.

The long and doleful *Nakar Nīṅku paṭalam* at last winds to an end but not the pathos, for the next *paṭalam* of 86 verses deals with Cumantira<u>n</u>'s return and the death of the tortured king. There are, funnily, three stanzas put in towards the end of this *paṭalam* where the citizens who had accompanied Rāma to a point outside the capital city wake up to see the wheelmarks of the royal chariot pointing towards the city. They are filled with joy that Rāma has decided to return, after all and they trek back to the city where they learn what had happened and are unhappy again.

But the darkest night must come to an end and with Kampa<u>n</u> at the controls, the sun of relief is urged to rise promptly at the very start of the next *paṭalam*. The three royal persons walk the country path enjoying the scenery and the ineffable peace all around. One

must envisage the hectic round of activities that a young prince (particularly of the popular type of Rāma) was expected to go through every day in the capital city, leaving little time for relaxation; Citai must have felt this particularly and longed for more time with Rāma. Suddenly all this is fulfilled and to these detached young people on whom the sudden and undeserved loss of pelf did not have much of a deleterious effect, the world looked so attractive and the privacy so enjoyable.

After the long, long passage of unmitigated sorrow comes quite a long one where a contrasting sentiment prevails; for a succession of *paṭalams* with a total of 176 stanzas is presented where the poet dexterously spins a joyful account of the three threading their way through incipient jungle, and of the meeting the incredibly affectionate Kukan̲, their crossing the Ganga and entering the primeval forest. There they see animal couples being devoted to each other; Rāma points out these scenes to Citai and they both feel a reinforced sense of well-being promoted by heightened conjugal bliss.

When Ilakkuvan̲ constructs a leafy cottage for Rāma and Citai to live in, Rāma congratulates his brother on the acquisition of this unusual skill (unusual for a prince, that is) and Ilakkuvan̲ is assailed by unhappy thoughts at the turn of events. Rāma consoles him saying, "There is a limit, Ilakkuvan̲ to kingly pelf and our ability to enjoy it. But to this pelf attainable through spiritual means in a forest there is no limit nor is there a limit to the bliss that comes out of that! And as a sequel, we shall inherit everlasting beatitude through such a life"?. This is a fitting statement made by the totally detached Rāma in the most appropriate setting that can be conceived for it".

Then follows the sorrow of Paratan̲ and the anguish of Rāma at learning of his father's death. So happiness follows tragedy and is followed in turn by pathos-filled events as in life itself, but here, masterminded by a great artist in deference to a great law of aesthetics.

His genius at selectivity

A second viewpoint from which to study great literature is to examine how the poet has applied his great privilege of selection, how well he has put to use the quality of selectivity in composing his work. The only aspect of selectivity that has struck Tamil critics is the selection of words, on which through ten centuries and more people have been writing and speaking interminably. There are, of course, many other fields where the poet is called upon to exercise selectivity. It starts with what story or topic to select on which to compose the poem. The selection of the main sentiment is very important and is co-eval with the selection of the main plot or motif. You cannot select the latter half of *Māhabhārata* as your plot unless you are good at depicting "vira rasa", the sentiment of heroism.

The catalogue of fields in which the poet is expected to exercise his gift of selectivity intelligently is indeed long. He has to select, for instance what characters would be delineated in some detail. He also has to decide through which characters to reveal what information and opinions and judgment and to which characters to reveal it. In the matter of descriptions the poet has a stupefyingly large range of options to choose from and has therefore to display his selectivity to the highest degree. Over the choice of the words, the figures of speech to be employed and the metres to be harnessed, the poet has to be unremittingly alert if his work is to secure the acceptance of the cognoscenti. The field is very wide indeed and the subject itself, fascinating. In order to confine this work to a reasonable size, let us take one example, the question of selectivity in the matter of descriptions and see how Kampa<u>n</u> has put to use this precious quality in composing his work.

To illustrate this, we shall select the *Kiṭkintā Kāṇṭam* where Rāma is shown in the deepest despondency owing to the loss of Citai; in the first *paṭalam* itself where the Pampā lake is described, Kampa<u>n</u> selects, out of the thousands of flora and fauna only those

which will help him to reinforce the prevailing sentiment, pathos owing to Rāma feeling deeply anguished at the separation from Citai. In one of the stanzas, Kampaṉ describes a swan which being separated from its mate is so anguished that it is more dead than alive; the swan hears the sweet tickling of the leg-ornaments of divine damsels and listens keenly under the illusion that it is its mate sounding. The symbolic significance of this is easy to see; to Rāma's prejudiced senses, only such scenes and sounds are perceivable. He sees only those birds which are well-known for their attachment to their mates; and he is shown addressing them asking for information about Citai's whereabouts. For instance when addressing the peacock he asks, "You have a thousand eyes (the black central spot in each feather resembles an eye); nothing can escape your attention. Will you not reveal her whereabouts to me?".

Then comes the rainy season. And separated lovers feel the pangs of separation much more keenly in that season. Traditionally, since all work comes to a stop during rainy season except agricultural operations, those who are on tour on the king's or other business all are expected to return home with the first rains. Hence the rainy reason has been recognised as the proper time for the love-mode called "*mullai*" where separation ends in the reunion of lovers. Kampaṉ has devoted a whole long *paṭalam* of 121 verses to describe the onset of the rainy season over the hilly region in Kiṭkintai and Rāma's state of mind at this period of time.

The region must be redolent with thousands of varieties of birds, animals and insects and flowers and trees and shrubs and creepers. But the poet carefully selects only those that fulfill certain conditions which have to do with aesthetic considerations. Among those selected for depiction are those flora which show a preference for rains and which flourish during the season of rains so ostentatiously that they remind Rāma insistently of the season and his own miserable condition. The deep-red "indrakopa" insects rising in their

millions after the rains fall on the ground covering it completely, the ground resembling the floor of the room where women keep spitting out the red juice of betel leaves, during their union with their husbands in celebration of their return to them after a long period of separation. Here, to emphasise the point that the ground was filled with the bodies of falling insects, Kampaṉ uses the common phrase "without leaving free even a spot where a falling sesamum seed can be accommodated." Now sesamum is thrown only on occasions of obsequies and ancestor worship - inauspicious in symbolism, thus evoking the stark anguish of the occasion.

The poet then selects the *kuvaḷai* which closes its petals and '*mullai*' which blooms at the coming of rain. He compares the former to the eyes of girls whose husbands leave on long journeys and the latter to the smile of the girls whose handsome husbands have just returned to them after long separation. Lotuses too blossom as the faces of girls to whose houses loved guests have come. And the bees went into the flowers and with great desire brushed against their soft petals and stamens in an orgy of honey-drinking like lecherous men avidly devouring the pleasure of sex. Thus everywhere Kampaṉ selects examples from nature that show separated lovers which reinforce Rāma's anguish or lovers in union which kindle his longing and even envy. Everything in nature is suggestive of the conjugal bond, from the way the poet selects his examples with the sure eye of a master craftsman.

After this passage comes the natural, inevitable sequel-Rāma, powerfully influenced by these suggestive flora and fauna is in the grip of inconsolable grief; his words expressive of his deep anguish make exquisite poetry. Unfortunately most readers skip through these passages, translators omit them and speakers pass lightly over them. The real poetic value of the epic consists only in these stanzas eking out the main sentiment. The characteristic quality of the epic genre is that the poet can take time to describe the

atmosphere (of course, selectively as we have seen) and then to show how the atmosphere influences the main sentiment. Here, the reader will not fail to notice a two-fold layer of suggestion contributed by the surroundings, the skies, the rain clouds, the flora and the fauna. They first influence the main character whose lamentation follows as a matter of course. But they also, in a subtle manner, influence the reader whose mental gates are now wide open to receive the sentiment of love-in-separation.

Kampaṉ can be counted upon to squeeze the last drop of aesthetic value from any given situation. Having described the rainy season which gave considerable mental pain to Rāma in such detail, Kampaṉ now shows in a much shorter passage the end of the season of rains, harbingering relief for Rāma as the monkey king would now be in a position to send out search parties to locate Citai's whereabouts. Here the poet selects very suggestive features indicating the dawning of hope for the suffering hero. As the darkness brought about by the clouds receded, the skies became bright, suggesting the driving away of ignorance. The swans which had migrated during the rains all returned like the hero who, sensitive to the intense suffering of his wife left behind, decided that enough wealth had been accumulated and returned fast to her side. Betel-nut clusters assumed a golden tint from their earlier whitish hue; this was like the complexion of girls which had assumed a pallor during the period their husbands were wary to gather knowledge and which had returned to its normal colour on their return.

Kampaṉ, thus, has examples from nature which he could select to show extreme despondency as well as blessed relief. Illustrations can be cited from other passages in the work, too, to underscore this pronounced selective ability of the master. It is indeed a pity that his descriptive passages are so callously ignored by critics and scholars, when they can yield so much aesthetic gold on proper mining. One reason for this, of course, is the impatience with which

people approach an epic. While such a mental attitude may go well with a short poem, an epic poem, by the very nature of its genre, needs patient and careful study. And in the case of Kampaṉ, one can be sure that such a study will yield renewable bouts of aesthetic pleasure. The point to be borne in mind when one takes up the study of an epic is to sit and quietly enjoy one passage at a time; no attempt should be made to complete the work (which is out of the question) or even to complete a *kāṇṭam* at a sitting; in fact there should be no design, no striving in the mind to complete anything. The method should be to read on slowly, allowing the waves of pleasure to engulf us; even ten verses at a sitting should not cause disappointment. The target should not be the length of the passage covered; the target should rather be the depth of the experience registered.

Symbolism in the Rāmāyaṇam

All great poets make good use of symbolism. Enough has been said above to impress the reader with Kampaṉ's virtuosity in this important field. He must have been a excellent student of the *Caṅkam* lyrics from which he should have gathered a wealth of concepts in symbolism. The flags on the housetops of Mitilai city waving in the breeze symbolised a welcome (like hands being moved in welcome) for Rāma to the place where he was to marry Citai. The river Kōtāvari is delineated as if carrying a current of tears flooding at the reflection that these royal youngsters are forced to tread the difficult jungle; the symbolism presaging the calamitous entry of Cūrppaṇakai into their lives is eloquent, expressive.

In an epic of the dimensions of the *Rāmāyanam*, a vast span of time must be involved and it is the easiest thing to fulfil the condition stipulated in the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* that descriptions of sunrise and sunset should find a place in a *Kāppiyam*. While fulfilling this condition in ample measure, Kampaṉ makes excellent use of the sun and the moon rising and setting, as eloquent symbols. In verse

65 of *Kaikēyi Cūḻviṉaippaṭalam*, Kampaṉ delineates the red rising sun in the morning of the date fixed for Rāma's coronation as symbolising sun's anger at the inimical act done by the sinful queen. In the same Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam, when Rāma proceeds to the forest with Cītai and Ilakkuvaṉ, the sun is described as concealing himself in the western mountains owing to his inability to bear the sorrowful sight.

When the moon rises dispelling the darkness, Kampaṉ pays a striking tribute to it calling it the god that scatters the darkness that is most suited to the "raksasas" for performing their nefarious deeds; in the next verse he compares the moon with the beaming face of Dharmadevatai which feels much pleased at Rāma going forth to the forests to destroy the forces of evil.

One last example in the *Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam;* Rāma had left and Parataṉ was still in his uncle's place and the old king lay dead in the palace. So, says Kampaṉ, the sun, the first of the solar race rose in the east with all the royal paraphernalia, seemingly expressing his determination to rule the country himself. In Tamil tradition, the sea serves as the drum, the celestials sing the praise of the king and the rays of light serve as the royal sword for sun, the king.

Let us conclude this part with a telling example from the *Yutta Kāṇṭam.* The battle has been going on and a certain number of men have died in the field; but more are to die, many more, before the battle comes to an end. The sun rising crimson over the field signifies Rāma, the sun destroying the denizens of the night; in reality, says Kampaṉ, the sun only destroys the external darkness implying that Rāma dispels the inner darkness of the mind and the soul, too.

Characters' versions preferred

The question of who says what is one of considerable importance in literature. Tamil poets and grammarians have set great

store by characters' versions in preference to the poet's. If the character is well chosen, the reader gets a ringside version of an emotion-laden incident, with all the warmth and the authenticity and the involvement needed to make it a memorable and aesthetically satisfying experience. The poet's version, in comparison is apt to be cold and lacking in involvement; that it is likely to be more reliable and objective than a character's version which may exaggerate and even distort the truth is not an aspect that carries much weight in literature, as it is certain to do in a law court or a bank transaction. Authenticity and warmth and involvement are legal tender in the realm of literature, a cold objectivity is decidedly not.

It would be found that Kampan̲, taking a page out of the gifted *Caṅkam* poets, has presented the most important statements-those having an emotional value particularly-as characters' versions. Almost all the favorite quotations from Kampan̲ are the versions of one or other of the characters and this proves the point made. All those indictments of his mother by Paratan̲, those wonderfully sublime statements made by Rāma about the need to succour those seeking refuge will surely sound bland and weak and diluted in the poet's version. Anuman̲'s words and Citai's reactions in the *Cuntara Kāṇṭam* will not melt our hearts as they do now if they had come out as the version of the poet. Kukan̲ could not have become such a deeply chiselled figure in our hearts without those words dipped in love or burning with rage that are presented in his version.

The version of an involved character describes the reactions of another character as the first one sees it; this naturally means that through that, the mental workings of the first character (the one that gives the version) are revealed too. A very good instance of this is available in the two stanzas where Paratan̲ is described by Kōcalai and Kukan̲. The former says "Paratan̲ is even a better person than you are!" in reply to Rāma's statement that it was Paratan̲ who was to be crowned prince, not he. Kukan̲ suspects Paratan̲ of being

overly ambitious and jumps to the conclusion that his purpose in coming to the forests with his army was only to destroy Rāma; and when he realises eventually the noble purpose behind his visit, he is carried away to the extent of exclaiming, "Even a thousand Rāmas cannot equal you, O Paratā!".

In the first instance the remark of Kōcalai only reveals how fair-minded she is, how she does not discriminate among the four children of Tacarataṉ; we must remember she is after all Rāma's mother. There may also be a certain value judgment involved in this; Parataṉ is a firmer administrator than Rāma and for that reason might have made a very good king. The fourteen years of his rule in the absence of Rāma in the forests constitute the best proof of Kaucalya's observation.

In Kukaṉ's case, the remarks must be construed as something said in unrestrained enthusiasm by an unsophisticated forester. His love for Rāma was supreme and his discovery that Parataṉ was not there to harm him but to crown him gave so much relief to his anxious mind he burst out with this uncritical remark. The nature of the man and of the occasion justifies the extreme nature of Kukaṉ's remark.

The intelligent reader will not fail to be struck by the significant point that both these characters are inclined to compare people with Rāma, to use Rāma as the measuring tape to assess others. Psychologists will confirm the observation that when this happens, it always means that the personalities of the speakers are fully pervaded by the love of Rāma, to such an extent, in fact, that they can only understand the rest of creation through the medium of Rāma. It is a matter of daily observation that those who love and worship money (alas, how many of us are of this kind!) make frequent references to money in their talk, use money in their analogies and often even say that they value friendship or some such quality higher than money. These two assessments made by Kōcalai and Kukaṉ

are practically valueless as a measure of Rāma but they reveal a good deal about their own attitudes especially how high Rāma ranks with them.

These passages have been considered in some detail for the dexterous way in which Kampaṉ uses the very delicate and the not yet fully understood device of characters' versions. The present writer has listened to scholars discoursing on these with growing impatience as they invariably miss the point -- the vital point -- that the assessment of Rāma is made by some involved characters and expressed in their versions, that they are not the poet's own conclusive statements. They then go on to add that it is not customary for an epic hero to be devalued like this and that Kampaṉ nods here as Homer is said to nod in many places in the epics ascribed to him. What must rightly be construed by good students of aesthetics as excellent poetry thus gets misunderstood and devalued by Tamils whose forebears two thousand years ago had proved themselves to be inspired comprehenders of the secrets of characters' versions, long before the rest of the literary world got wise to them.

Similar glimpses of mental workings and attitudes of mind of many characters can be had through their utterances and a comparison of similarly placed characters too can be made on this basis. Ilakkuvaṉ and Parataṉ are both devoted brothers for whom Rāma was not only a brother, but father, teacher, mentor, God. But what a striking difference is their mental make-up comes out, what a difference in their individual kinds of love they bear to Rāma, all through the words they employ! The two rishis Vicuvāmittirar and Vaciṭṭar are very similar in their spiritual attainments but how different is their mental make-up! Vicuvāmittirar is dynamic, independent, aggressive, opinionated, oppressively egotistical while Vaciṭṭar is meek and submissive and is intensely aware that he is in the pay of the king, though he is indubitably a truthful person and spiritually very evolved.

Both Cukkirivan̲ and Vipīṭaṇan̲ are allies to Rāma who look to him for major benefits. But the monkey chieftain is coarse in his language and not fully aware of the greatness of his ally; he is harsh and can be cruel. Vipīṭaṇan̲ is definitely a superior person with high moral values who regards Rāma as his godly saviour. The telling difference between them comes out in the speeches they make; Kampan̲ does not step in to make assessments of them in his own objective words. Both Kukan̲ and Vipīṭaṇan̲ get extremely attached to Rāma but what a difference in their backgrounds and levels of culture! Vipīṭaṇan̲ as a scion of a royal family is sophisticated, of cultivated speech; and he displays the benefits of a formal education while Kukan̲ is a forester with no education, no book-learnt culture but gifted with a wonderfully warm heart which can love with a fierce, self-effacing love. And the significant thing to note is that these differences are brought out not only clearly and vividly but interestingly and aesthetically through the versions they present, in their own words, warm with the feelings that jostle in their heart.

Some vital concepts

Many of the things we have lined up thus far may be regarded as devices, important and significant and dexterously handled but devices, withal. It will be necessary now to consider overall concepts which make the epic poem what it is. It is possible that Kampan̲ decided to compose the epic as a channel or medium for the propagation of these overall concepts. It is certainly true that the epic is read and will continue to be read, not for Kampan̲'s wise and even inspired handling of devices like symbolism and characters' versions but, for these overall concepts which form the personality of the epic. If we use the over-worked analogy of the Sanskrit rhetoricians, then these devices form the ornaments which Dame Muse wears lovingly while these concepts of overwhelming importance constitute her soul.

If they constitute the soul of epic poetry, then, it is important

that we know what these concepts are and why they are important. In reality there is one cardinal concept and a few lesser ones, lesser only in comparison with this cardinal one. And the wonderful thing about this cardinal, central concept is that it is equally of importance from the viewpoints of aesthetics and of religion-an unusual situation, as these two branches do not always agree in regard to their priorities and occasionally emphasise quite opposite things.

The principle, stated from the view point of religion is that God is most useful to men only when He comes down in incarnation as man. When enunciated from the view point of aesthetics, only one word need be changed; He is most interesting to men only when He comes down in incarnation as man.

As far as the religious principle is concerned, it is not intended, for obvious reasons, to spend much time over its exposition. God's availability to man is very much increased when He comes down as an incarnation. During the duration of the incarnations (primarily as Rāma and Krishna) He was directly available to His devotees who could see Him, touch Him, hear Him talk or play on the flute and even bathe Him and strike Him (while a baby). After the incarnations have ended devotees are still left with the many wonderful stories of His exploits; they could reinforce their devotion by regaling themselves with these stories. As compassion is one of the chief qualities of God that comes out to great advantage in these accounts of incarnations, generations of devotees could feel hopeful of deliverance by Him. Vaiṣṇava thinkers all feel that His greatest service to His devotees was not, as is wrongly supposed, His destruction of men of evil like Rāvaṇaṉ; it was and still is and forever shall be this encouragement, inspiration, confidence and interest they derive from His acts in *avatārams*, particularly the *avatārams* as man.

Religion is not a Sunday or Friday affair, as the truly pious of all religions always insist. It is an all-day, all the year round love-affair with God. But the difficulty arises even in the case of truly

pious people that the material relating to God runs out after a few days or weeks of contemplation and recounting-or would have run out had it not been for the incarnations. But the acts and words of Rāma and Krishna are there, endlessly entertaining, limitlessly encouraging and inspiring and the exercise of recounting His acts and words need never come to an end for want of material. This is the great advantage of God appearing as man. Devotees need not fear Him on account of His greatness and avoid Him now that He has shown Himself as a man, in a status comparable to theirs. And His words of advice (like the Bhagavadgita) come to acquire much greater authenticity and weight from the fact that Krishna was a man like us (or almost like us). Rāma's sufferings and sacrifices convey a stronger message to us simply because He came down to live in the haunts of man with the limitations that hamstring man.

The aesthetic version is of greater interest to us just now and needs a close examination. According to this, God, however powerful and glorious and omniscient He is, becomes more interesting to the dilettante in His incarnation as man. Indeed the aesthete is likely to take up an even more radical position than this and insist that God becomes interesting only in His incarnation as man; and the more He conducts Himself as man with all his limitations, the more interesting He becomes. The basis of this kind of thinking is very simple: man loves to hear and read about his own kind. There is an evolutionary urge behind this which is under active research but an explanation of the factors involved in it is quite beyond the scope of this book. It is sufficient for the purposes of this study to know that this thirst of man to learn more and more about homo-sapiens is deep-seated and fundamental and not a mere caprice.

So, under this deep-seated urge, man exerts himself to know more and more about himself, his kin, his kind; whether he is engaged in his pursuit of money or in enjoying art and literature, his preoccupation is the study of man. And art and literature appeal

to man only in proportion to the extent and nature of the material they can purvey (and the manner they purvey it) about man.

All literary and art critics everywhere in the world insist on identification between the dilettante and the characters for the success of the art product. This identification itself becomes possible only if the dilettante discovers among the characters men and women most similar to himself. This creation of the conditions leading to identification itself is a concession to man's longing to learn more about himself, to man's universal egocentrism. For he seeks in art and literature opportunities to study the reactions, the sequel, the implications in respect of representatives of his own kind when they are placed in different situations, full of dramatic potential-opportunities that may not occur in life and when they occur cannot always be studied with objectivity. Identification otherwise cannot always be pleasurable as when the characters with whom the dilettante identifies are undergoing sufferings. Hence the real significance of identification is not that the dilettante identifies himself with the characters so as to undergo whatever they go through; the significance of this process is that the dilettante identifies, among the characters, those who are most prolifically seen around him, in short those who are most human and then gets interested in their doings, urged by this fundamental evolutionary urge of which we have spoken.

Literature and other forms of art deal with many things non-human. Nature is very often presented with its flora and fauna, with its aspect of landscape and climatological ingredients like rain and storm and cyclone. Angels and demons and gods play a part in them; in the epics of olden days they had a big part to play. How does this square with the principle we have enunciated?

It would be seen that nature is brought in mainly as a background to present man in a better light; often it is used to eke out the prevailing sentiment by *Caṅkam* poets and by Kampaṉ, their

aptest pupil. Cases in which a serpent bites a character or a character is struck by lightning are not of this category for here nature plays an active part in the work.

In fables, animals are made characters; but they become interesting to us not as animals but because they are endowed with human characteristics. A cat is depicted as a hypocrite and the jackal, in reality, is a very cunning man. The genre of fables was developed mainly to teach morals through an interesting medium to children.

Angels and demons and gods may be brought in to generate supernatural effects on which much of the action in old epics depended. But it has been realised by aesthetes that this device of supernatural effects should be used to the minimum extent necessary, as otherwise, the atmosphere of realism is badly disturbed; and this realistic atmosphere is necessary to persuade the dilettante to believe in what is happening in the book or on the stage, such a belief being essential to promote a smooth transfer of experience, the essential transaction without which there can be no enjoyment of art. Supernatural occurrences generate surprise which when used sparingly performs some useful aesthetic purposes. But in excess, it warps aesthetic delight; and more than ever so little of it becomes excess in this case. So we are now left with cases where angels, demons and gods play a part in the work as characters, not merely to generate supernatural occurrences but to participate in the every day drama, as part of the very fabric of the work. Here, lesser poets persist in showing them as superhuman and fail to evoke reader - or spectator-interest. Poets of the calibre of Kampaṉ present even these superhuman characters as essentially human and thus secure the interest of their readers whose urge to see humans undergoing varied experiences is fulfilled.

Rāma as a human

Kampaṉ selected the Rāma story essentially from Vālmīki and partly from the oral tradition current all over the country. Vālmīki

had no difficulty in presenting Rāma as a man. Indeed, the idea of incarnation had not been developed during his time and he wrote his monumental epic on one whom he regarded as the greatest of men. There are references in his *Pālakāṇṭam* pointing to the belief that Rāma was an incarnation of Tirumāl. But many scholars now agree that either these passages in the *Pālakāṇṭam* are interpolations or that the whole *kāṇṭam* was composed and inserted later.

But by the time Kampaṉ came on the scene, the belief in Rāma as an incarnation of God Tirumāl had taken root universally in the entire country, thus making things very difficult for Kampaṉ. The master's calibre should be judged from the success he has been able to register in making a man of Rāma without exacerbating the feelings of the people who believe overwhelmingly in his divinity. This compound of two quite diametrically opposed concepts has been achieved by Kampaṉ in a masterly manner possible only to a man of genius. To indicate this manner of his doing it briefly, the other characters appearing in the epic generally affirm Rāma's divinity but Rāma himself never admits it and he conducts himself under all circumstances as a man, an extraordinarily gifted one, perhaps but a man, withal.

Not only the other characters but Kampaṉ himself frequently affirms the divinity of Rāma from the time he was born. This is reasonable, as unless the poet, in his version confirms this, his readers will not be convinced of Kampaṉ's belief. A verse from the *Pālakāṇṭam* speaking of Rāma's birth, in the poet's own version:

The great Kaucalyā to the world's gain
Gave birth to that dazzling splendour,
The inscrutable rain-cloud which once
Had hidden in its stomach all the Worlds. (14)

Though Vicuvāmittirar does not mention Rāma's divinity, Vaciṭṭar knows it and specifically refers to it. Parataṉ too mentions it in terms of great reverence while refusing to accept the crown of Ayōttiyā,

proffered to him (2257). Most characters talk of it in so many words and some clearly imply it. Even the somewhat immature Cukkirīvan̲ realises that God Almighty has come down to earth as man (3804). It is a remarkably consistent feature that Rāma never once mentions it, never even hints at his own divinity, never claims any divine right and as in the instance of seeking Cītai, never makes use of his omniscience. This cannot be accidental; this has been specifically designed to yield two important implications, that for the masses, Rāma's divinity is presented as something beyond question and for the aesthetic elite, Rāma's humanity is kept in the forefront as a literary necessity, as an aesthetically inescapable condition.

The question may be asked why this is an aesthetically inescapable condition. In instance after instance, Rāma is under test as to whether he admits to being God and he comes out successful as he neither admits his divinity by word or suggestion nor does he behave in a superhuman manner. And any well-equipped critic will notice that if this had not been so, the aesthetic worth of the work would have been irrepairably damaged. For consider the passage in *Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam* where Kaikēyi communicates the King's command that Rā ma should spend the next 14 years in the forests and that Paratan̲ should rule in his stead. Rāma did not take this command badly, he did not lose his equanimity during the testing hours when the attention of the world was focussed on him. But he did not display any divine qualities like prescience, either. His total detachment making it possible for him to remain quietly happy when the brightest throne in the world was being taken away from him was a part of his native temperament, not an aspect of divine quality, not born out of a prescient conviction that he would win in the end.

One does not feel shattered when something that appears only slightly desirable is denied; but when something that is more valuable to one than one's own life is taken away, one displays one's true nature and anguish is openly displayed. In truth Rāma did not set

much store by the position of kingship; but he valued Citai above his own self. And witness what happens to his equanimity and detachment when Citai is discovered missing from the cottage in the jungle. Rāma's lamentations continuing to the end of the *Āraṇiya Kāṇṭam* are the most natural reaction of a helpless human crushed by a relentless fate over which he has no control.

A fact that is not often recognised by many readers of the epic (particularly by the intensely pious ones among them) is that Rāma *is the greatest lover in all the* Classical Age. And, for him the inexplicable loss of Citai is the cruellest blow. And he reacts accordingly, without restraint. Consider how the epic would have turned out to be if Rāma smilingly tells Ilakkuvan̲ not to worry for Citai's kidnapping was part of his (Rāma's) divine purpose to extirpate the cursed brood of evildoers. The epic poem would have lost a great deal of its emotional content which is the heart of any creative work of art. If, on the other hand, Rāma is reported telling himself, "I am God incarnate and I know I shall triumph, in the end. But I have worn man's clothes and I shall have to play the part convincingly" and then he is presented lamenting, wailing out his heart, the poem would have lost all its credibility-which would spell the end of its vogue as a creative work of art.

The loss of Citai was a major event and that was chosen as a clinching example. But, at every stage, Rāma behaves in the most natural manner as a man, noble, compassionate and forgiving, it is true, but still a man. The purpose of the poet was clearly to show how a man, thrown into the maelstrom of a particularly eventful life, with its rich potential for suffering and a little compensation here and there can still conduct himself in a noble manner so as to be a model for all future generations. He could not have achieved his purpose if Rāma's divinity comes out every now and then, piercing his thin veneer of humanness. And he needed the large canvas of an epic to trace the fortunes of his hero, armed with his qualities

and weighted down with his human limitations going through a life, rich with eventful happenings.

Kampa<u>n</u>'s social emphasis

There are many other concepts worked out in the course of the epic but as they belong to the field of ethics and morality, they need not detain us. In passing, the present writer would like to refer to one of them for a specific reason. Hinduism of the days earlier to the advent of Buddhism and Jainism was essentially a code of conduct, rituals and prescriptions and proscriptions for the individual. The sacrifice-cult glorified the individual (though the benefits of a sacrifice may accrue to the society); and the cult of *Ñā<u>n</u>am* was strictly individual in scope and application. The two protestant religions opened up new horizons, particularly the cult of ahimsa and Hinduism began to cultivate a social dimension. Kampa<u>n</u> gave a strong social emphasis in his great epic and utilised every opportunity to glorify the social consciousness of his hero; as examples one can cite 1349-1353; 1423, 2429, 3803, 3804, 6411 and 6468 to 6481 illustrating these social qualities of Rāma, this being of course a very casual selection of mere samples. (The numbers refer to the edition published by the Kampa<u>n</u> Ka<u>l</u>akam, Madras) In a real sense, the whole epic is an expansion of this principle that men gifted with abilities or power or possessions should use them towards the betterment of their fellowmen. Kampa<u>n</u> used the liberating width and expanse of the epic genre to work out this and other principles which he held sacred. He was an idealist and a dreamer whose most recurring phantasies were concerned with the largest good of the largest number and through his immortal poem he gave the most vivid shape to these dreams and phantasies. The fact that the world has not profited much from these is certainly not through any shortcoming of Kampa<u>n</u>'s. He stands overtopping all the literary dreamers of the Tamil land; he must certainly be reckoned one of the tallest figures in the world's Hall of Fame.

Pāratams in Tamil

The Rāma story and the events and characters of the *Mahābhāratam* have been current in the Tamil land from the *Caṅkam* days. There are many reference to the *Pāratam* war and to the Pāṇṭavar in the *Caṅkam* lyrics. A poet who is referred to as 'Peruntēvanār who sang the *Pāratam*' has composed the prayer stanzas for some of the *Caṅkam* collections. His *Pāratam* has not come down to us. But there are two fragmentary works called *Māvintam* and *Pārata Veṇpā*, both ascribed to one Peruntēvaṉār. It is extremely difficult to assert or deny that this Peruntēvaṉār is identical with the poet mentioned earlier. Perhaps these works were available in a fuller form at the time Villiputtūrar composed his monumental work and on this work becoming widely accepted, the earlier ones just faded away. However, one of them, the *Pārata Veṇpā* is in a peculiar genre, seldom met with in Tamil; it has verses with prose passages thrown in between rather like the *Campu* genre in Sanskrit.

The only significant work in Tamil composed on the *Mahābhāratam* in Sanskrit is that authored by Villiputtūrar. As it is a major epic poem of consequence, we shall study it in some detail.

The Villipāratam

The poet was a Vaiṣṇava Brahmin belonging to Caṉiyūr in Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam. As he has nothing to do with Villiputtūr in south Pāṇṭiya country, it is clear that he was given this name at birth, his parents intending to call him after the renowned saint Periyāḻvār who flourished in Villiputtūr. He found a patron in a local chieftain Vakkapakai Varapatiyāṭkoṇṭāṉ who seems to have urged him to compose the *Pāratam* in Tamil. He is ascribed to the second half of the 14th century.

Like Kampaṉ, Villi too (for that is the affectionate dimunitive form to which his longish name is usually contracted) took the story from the Sanskrit original and wove his own poem with many

typically Tamil concepts like the four-fold division of the land. He himself states at the beginning of his epic that it was his great devotion for Lord Krishna that made him take up this story for composition. He was more pious than Kampa<u>n</u> and less of a poet with the result that his work is lesser as a literary creative effort than Kampa<u>n</u>'s. But to regard any Tamil work as lesser than Kampa<u>n</u>'s reflects no discredit on that; Villi's *Pāratam* ranks as one of the most important epic poems in Tamil.

Despite his great piety and devotion for Kaṇṇa<u>n</u> Villi maintains a wonderfully catholic attitude towards other cults in his work. His epic starts with a prayer to Vināyaka, a Saiva God and we find him maintaining an enlightened attitude of tolerance towards Saivism and other sects in his work. A feature of Tamil works of later ages is the preponderant use of Sanskrit words and we find this feature in *Villi Pāratam.* Despite this, we find him a great admirer of the Tamil language for whose greater glory he adds a prayer at the outset. That he was an outstanding scholar in Tamil and a facile poet is not in doubt. He was particularly adept at describing war scenes. He seems to have been fond of verbal tricks-again a feature of the times he lived in. He is generally regarded as a more difficult writer than Kampa<u>n</u> with a pedantic style marked by unusual usages and, as pointed out earlier, by a high percentage of Sanskrit words.

The *Pāratam* story is big by itself; Vyāca makes it mighty bigger with a large number of episodes and anecdotes like Naḷa<u>n</u>'s story and with many long passages where the ethical code is imparted. Villi had no difficulty in filling the larger canvas provided by the epic genre; in fact he makes a genuine attempt at epitomising the story into 6000 verses (as the legend goes) of which only 4337 stanzas are available to us. Villi introduces the items listed by *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* as characteristic of an epic, without any difficulty as the *Pāratam* story itself offers scope for most of them, in its natural course.

Tanṭi insists on an epic talking about all the four basic purposes of man (the purusharthas). *Aṟam* (ethics) and *poruḷ* (wealth) come in naturally for balladizing in the poem. There is much less scope for Iṉpam (sensuous pleasure) in the *Mahābhāratam* than in the *Rāmāyaṇam*; still Villi has made fairly good use of the occasions offering. It must still be stated that sensuous passages are a rarity in this sombre epic. The fourth basic purpose, Viṭu is very lightly dealt with, in common with all Tamil works; for the Tamils believed that if man takes care of the other three purposes through a well-ordained life, the fourth will take care of itself, it need not be specially striven for. Until very late in the day, Tamil literature has been preoccupied with the life in this planet, with the 'here and now' rather than with the hereafter. The emphasis slowly shifted to heaven and hell and the hereafter in the centuries after Sanskrit and Prakrit and Pāli works began to wield great influence in the Tamil land.

A major literary and ideational influence over Villi was the hymnal utterances of the Āḻvārs which he must have studied avidly in his school days. He works in many of the spiritual ideas of Nammāḻvār in his epic. In many of the stanzas in his epic describing Kaṇṇaṉ, we see the shadow of these Āḻvārs' hymns fallen, like a benediction. Like Kampaṉ, Vill- makes excellent use of the inspired utterances of these authentic saints of God to light up his work.

As the story is war-dominated and philanthropy gets enthroned by Karṇaṉ there is great scope for the various *puṟam* modes catalogued by Tolkāppiyar. Villi seems to have mastered all these and punctiliously presented them in his war poem. He has the language for it and perhaps the temperament too, if we trust the apocryphal story of his polemical exercises ending in his cutting off the ears of the vanquished.

Everyone who has anything to do with literature admits the primacy of sentiments in literature, particularly in poetry. Tanṭi would like an epic to provide scope for all the sentiments. Villi

satisfies this requirement without any difficulty as the complex story itself furnishes scope for all the sentiments to be painted in. There is love, though little of it premarital, there is plenty of anger and heroism as the bulk of the story is about the great war; there is a lot of pathos with the Pāṇṭavas being forced to give up kingship and spend twelve years in the forest and one year, incognito. There is plenty of scope for wonder with a lot of supernatural events happening. Humour is seldom seen delineated in classical works as it is nourished by irreverence, an attitude very seldom met with in those days. Grammarians will declare that Taṇṭi's condition in regard to sentiments has been fulfilled in this epic.

Some illustrative stanzas

Let us now study a few passages in order to get a first hand experience of this important poet's virtuosity. In the *Ātiparuvam*, just before recounting Pāṇṭu's lapse from restraint which costs him his life, the poet describes the advent of *Vacantam*, the spring season emphasising its inebriating nature. In the first verse (verse 91) he states that the spring came to crown the god of love-the god that troubles those who are separated from their loved ones. In the next verse, the bowers under the ruthless urge of the season become inebriated, deluded and confused even like people who have imbibed not wisely but too well. Here the poet plays on the word *matu* which means alcohol as well as the spring season, to yield this metaphor. It clearly suggests how Pāṇṭu with his mental control loosened by the inebriating effect of the season lets go his restraint and sports with Mātiri in defiance of the curse, losing his life on that account.

In defence of the concept that considerations of caste and the circumstances of one's birth do not matter at all in the case of outstanding persons, Turiyōtaṉaṉ makes a statement to encourage Karṇaṉ and justifying his decision to crown him king of Aṅkatēcam, it is full of wisdom and is worth quoting here:

Among the well-read, the goodly virgins,
Among the generous philanthropists,
Among the valorous, the king of pelf
And among the enlightened ones
Of spotless conduct, there are no tiers
No distinctions of caste and birth

(68, Adi) *(15)*

In the *Capāparuvam*, there are several descriptions which show Villi's class; the triumphant military exploits of the five Pāṇṭava brothers are described with verses where the sound echoes with the sense. The passage where Cicupālaṉ insults the Lord and gets killed is done with verve and tempo; the poet has cleverly made the diatribes of Cicupālaṉ sound bad on the surface but yield praise and reverence for the ineffable qualities of the Lord, on deeper reflection.

There are similarly very exalted passages in the *Vaṉaparuvam* where the Pāṇṭavas meet a number of noble ascetics. The *Virāṭaparuvam* is an interesting part where a lot of things happen and the Pāṇṭavas are incognito and the Kauravar try their best to uncover them and there is the excitement of the chase pervading the whole.

The *Utyōka paruvam* is filled with accounts of various measures taken to avert the war, in the earlier part, and to prepare for the inevitable clash of arms, in the latter. The Kauravar send Cañcayaṉ as their messenger of peace; the noble ascetic tries his best to make peace but fails and returns. Lord Krishna too undertakes a mission of peace and fails. Just before he leaves on his mission, he asks Tarumaṉ what he wants achieved. And Tarumaṉ pleads for a peaceful conclusion to the wranglings between cousins and in a great stanza says that rather than kill everybody and wade to the throne through a sea of blood to rule the world unquestioned, he would prefer to wander in the forests subsisting on fruits and roots.

Cakātēvan͟, the wise brother of Taruman͟, the one who had attained enlightenment makes a lofty speech, too, saying that whatever people do or do not do, the Lord's will will finally prevail. Most people around had not realised Krishna's divinity but Cakātēvan͟ says he has and so he falls in with the Lord's thinking and has nothing to advise him. Krishna smilingly asks him how the war can be stopped to which the wise Pāṇṭavas replies, a retort that has become famous for its content of wisdom and of prescience:

Karṇa should rule
Pārtha be killed
Tiraupati's tresses
Be wholly shorn:
And , shackling your feet,
If I can tie you ,
Feet and hands,
Then only can
The cataclysmic war
Be staved off, Kaṇṇa,
In no way else!

(Uttiyōka/KiruṭṭiṇanTūtu/35) *(16)*

The Lord playfully challenges Cakātēvan͟ to tie him up and he does it too, with the power of his mind and in warm appreciation of his feat, the Lord shows his true form to him. Cakātēvan͟ overwhelmed, prays to him to protect the five brothers during the dreaded war. The Lord agrees to do so and leaves, making it clear to the devoted Pāṇṭavas that war is inevitable . His failure in his peace mission too is thus a part of the Lord's grand strategy for the greatest good of the greatest number.

Villi does not describe the events after the end of the war, as Vyāca does in the original. He decided, obviously in conformity with

the Tamil tradition, not to tell the sequel where the Pāṇṭavas die and go to heaven. He stops his epic with the crowning of Taruma<u>n</u> on which Krishna returns to Tuvārakai, thus cutting off a whole *paruvam* of the Sanskrit original. However, the poet's sense of proportion helps to create a feeling of completeness at all stages: the reader does not feel hurried or denied something that rightfully should have been furnished to him by the poet. The endless consultations, the long speeches and the limitless homilies of the Sanskrit original which turn the reader away from a perusal of the work are rightly snipped away but *nothing of significance is omitted and the reader* is left with a feeling of satisfied repletion at this very sensibly rendered *Pāratam*, in Tamil.

The other Pāratams

We have already taken note of the *Pārata Veṇpā* and the *Māvintam* both ascribed to Peruntēvaṉār. The former is rendered in a mixture of prose and verse, the prose portion being vital for maintaining the continuity of narration. In a work of research on the *Pāratam* in Tamil, R. Vicuvanātaṉ states critically that Peruntēvaṉār can present in a subtle manner the differences in character trends. For instance, both Turiyōtaṉaṉ and Tarumaṉ send out letters asking the many titled heads of the country to come with their armies to help them in the ensuing war. But the former's letter breathes arrogance and holds out threats in the event of non-compliance while the latter makes a polite request for their help. The poet's metaphors are finely conceived and his manipulation of the *Veṇpā* metre is efficient.

The fragment of *Māvintam* that is available now is smaller than that of the *Pāratavenpā*. There is a dispute on whether this was composed by the author of the *Pārata Veṇpā*. This deals with the last part of the story where the death of the five Pāṇṭavas and of Krishna and the destruction of the Yātava race are narrated. The work is noteworthy mainly because of vivid descriptions of nature.

Another poet, by name, Ampalattāṭumaiyar composed a small epic-fragment called *Ātiparuvattu-ātiparuvam*, so called because he had taken only the incidents of the first part of the *Ātiparuvam* for his material. The work is not remarkable on any account except for a certain descriptive power and a sense of sound and rhythm, qualities common enough in Tamil and Sanskrit too. There is another epic-fragment sung by Aṭṭāvatāṉam Araṅkanāṭak Kavirāyar. This deals only with the last portions of Viyāca's epic not balladized by Villi; as the story itself is of a sombre nature, there is great scope for ethical and philosophical reflection and the poet does justice to this. He belonged to the middle of the 18th century.

In the beginning of the 19th century arose yet another version of the *Pāratam*. This was composed by Nallāppiḷḷai who launched it in Kāñcipuram in front of the icon of Lord Varataracar. This is the longest of all the known works on the *Pāratam* story, containing 13949 stanzas of which 3861 stanzas are taken wholesale from Villi's famous epic. A further peculiarity of the work is that one Murukappiḷḷai's verses, too, have been included here and there in four of the *paruvams*. Hence Nallāppiḷḷai's *Pāratam* is really an anthology of the poems composed by three poets, Nallāppiḷḷai himself, Murukappiḷḷai and Villi. This must be regarded as truly an extraordinary phenomenon in the days after the *Caṅkam* era.

The poet sings with equal fervour of the gods; it is probable that he was a Saiva. He follows the Tamil tradition punctiliously singing whole sections on the country and the capital city. His notable qualities are a picturesque imaginative and narrative faculty, easy manipulative control over the verses and a talent in using the figures of speech to advantage. A small work called *Pāratacāravenpā* was composed in the middle of this century by Perumāḷ Cuvamikaḷ. The work is very short and is not without its merits.

The Periyapurāṇam

The *Rāmāyaṇam* and the *Pāratam* are epics glorifying Tirumāl. This fact appears to be of little note today but this counted for a great deal in the centuries gone by. Many staunch Saivites ignored Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam*. It is said that the great Civañāṉa Muṉivar, one of the foremost advocates of Siddanta Saivam studied with great care the greatest Tamil works of the Jains and used some concepts and expressions from them in his works. Even Maṟai Malai Aṭikaḷ of our own times, a great Siddhanthist had not read Kampaṉ, for a long time on the basis of this prejudice and then realising his loss, made up for it by mastering the great epic poem. Cult-based prejudices have been very dominant in this country; *Cilappatikāram* and *Cintāmaṇi* have not received the credit due to them mainly on account of the prejudice of the Hindu majority against these Jain works. These prejudices are no longer dominant today but they cannot be said to have died down totally and they raise their ugly heads at the most unexpected moments.

Cēkkiḻār's *Periyapurāṇam* is a work of very considerable distinction, for more than one reason. He was the first to compose a purely Saiva epic at a time when the greatest extent Tamil works were either Jain or Vaiṣṇava. He was absolutely unique in composing a work, not on Siva Himself, but on His devotees, with a great deal of factual matter carefully verified. His work is again unique in another important respect; most of the great Jain and Buddhist works and the two great Vaiṣṇava epics were based on Sanskrit works, though the greatest among them like *Cintāmaṇi* and *Rāmāyaṇam* display considerable originality; the *Periyapurāṇam* not only did not have any Sanskrit source, it served as a kind of inspiration to Saivas in the Kannada country and elsewhere to compose works on Saiva saints in other languages.

Another uniqueness associated with this great work that is of particular interest to a student of genres is that Cēkkiḻār seems,

unconsciously, to have produced a separate and distinct literary genre in the *Periyapurāṇam*. Cēkkiḻār tries his best to give a centrality of theme and enforce conformity with established tradition by making Cuntarar the hero of his poem. But excepting that he appears in the beginning and in the end of the work and in the *Purāṇams* of the Nāyaṉmār who were his contemporaries, this device has totally failed to knit the work together in a literary fashion and it remains an anthology of several *Purāṇams* on Saiva saints knit together by its religious motif alone. Hence this work is a unified unit only from the view point of the central motif which is wholly religious but not from the literary viewpoint of an organically unified plot and a single hero. It therefore defies classification and it would seem advisable to create a genre separately to accommodate the *Periyapurāṇam*.

But here again we face the difficulty of having to assess a work where, according to Aristotle and Coleridge and the School of Genre Critics, the basic requirement of form is not fulfilled, where the parts are not organically related to the whole. The test of such organic relationship is what happens if a part is taken out. A well-structured literary work will be knocked out of shape as a result. But, if you take off one or more of the *Purāṇams* relating to the saints who came earlier than Cuntarar, the work shows no significant difference, the loss is not noticeable. A similar criticism can of course be made and sustained against *Cintāmaṇi*, too, as it is merely a collection of episodes not interrelated; the only difference (which goes in favour of the Jain work) is that at least the hero is constant, he figures prominently in all the episodes.

The truth of the matter is that the *Periyapurāṇam* is a loose collection of narratives, the only binding factor being the religious bond of devotion to Siva. Cēkkiḻār attempts to create a central literary motif by calling Cuntarar his hero but this is not convincing as most of the events happening in the *Purāṇam* took place before

Cuntarar was born. Let us not therefore labour the point but take the work as it is and enjoy it. For, once the question of organic form is taken off the agenda, the *Periyapurāṇam* scores quite high as a literary work.

Cēkkiḻār, a minister under a Cōḻa king in the 12th century composed the *Periyapurāṇam* in 12 *Carukkams*, the verses numbering over 4000. The two works of guidance and inspiration for taking up such an unusual work were Cuntarar's *patikam* on Saiva devotees called *Tiruttoṇṭattokai* and Nampiyāṇṭār Nampi's *Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti* of 89 verses. Cēkkiḻār gave expression to his overflowing gratitude for Cuntarar by making him the hero of his epic. Even though the devotees of God were always commanding reverence and stanzas expressive of this sentiment were sung by the saint-minstrels themselves, it became the basis of a cult only with Cēkkiḻār's unique work. There are two works called *Kuruparampara prapāvam* composed on similar lines, on Vaisṇava Āḻvārs but they could not match the *Periyapurāṇam* either in authenticity or in literary worth. If the Vaiṣṇavas were fortunate to have wonderful glosses for their *Pirapantam* while the Saivites have none, the Saivites were very lucky (as a compensation) to have a beautiful biography collection of the Saiva saints of a quality not matched by what the Vaiṣṇavas have in that genre.

Cēkkiḻār's even-handedness

Cēkkiḻār's treatment of his subject is uniquely fair, even handed, uninfluenced by the worldly status, caste and other factors relating to the devotees. For some of them were kings and brahmins and Veḷḷāḷars while others were drawn from lower castes, Nantaṉār belonging to the lowest of them. But Cēkkiḻār, minister to the realm treats all of them with reverential respect and his stanzas are clearly expressive of this. He does not, naturally, devote equal space to all of them. Regarding some of them, nothing much is known except

the one incident which has immortalised their names as ardent devotees of the Lord. Cēkkiḻār maintains the most scrupulous regard to veracity and where, after considerable research, he is unable to discover factual details, he makes no attempt to fill the blanks with hearsay material.

On the other hand, in the case of major saints like Cuntarar himself, the hero of the poem, Ñāṉa Campantar and Nāvukkaracar, where plenty of particulars and heart-warming episodes were available, he devotes plenty of time to them; in fact there is a saying that Campantar's story is half of *Periyapurāṇam.* In the *purāṇams* devoted to these saint-minstrels, he thoughtfully provides the background (often involving a delightful story) for the *Tēvāram* hymns that were composed in the many holy places. These stories must have been current during his time and had it not been for Cēkkiḻār's industry, tenacity and devotion, these may have been irrevocably lost to us.

Cēkkiḻār was primarily a devotee whose fervour, joining hands with his scholarship generated good quality poetry. In this respect he must be distinguished from Kampaṉ who preeminently and primarily was a poet by native gift, who developed devotion to God as he went on. Cēkkiḻār's poetic insight is revealed in many places; if we compare the introductory verses in the many *purāṇams*, we discover how the gifted poet suggestively creates the proper atmosphere for the presentation of a farmer's life and the life of a merchant and of a vedic brahmin; in contrast, the introductory verses of the *purāṇam* on Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṉār build up a vivid picture of mountainous country populated by a tribe of hunters. Here we have exquisite portraits of hunting dogs tied to trees on the branches of which hang nets. Young boys of the tribe play fearlessly with tiger cubs and young elephants while the girls play with delight with those who are bound to them with powerful shackles of tender love.

His evocative descriptions

The poet while introducing the longest chapter on Campantar describes Ci_r_kā_l_i where he was born, in such a manner as to evoke the very scenes and smells of a brahmin settlement. One of the verses describes a scene in the outskirts of the city where even the trees appear to perform a homa (fire-ceremony) a fittingly suggestive introduction to the story of a brahmin boy who became a saint:

Honey, oozing from mangoes ripe
Falling on leaves gets sharply directed
On to the red lotuses, in bloom below
In the fields of paddy, making it appear
As if the trees are performing
A homa ritual with honey as ghee. (17)

The main sentiment that perfumes the work is devotion to Lord Siva; and the most sincere devotees of the Lord are enthroned. There is a great passage at the very outset where they are lauded, from which one stanza is given as a sample:

Blessed with the wealth of grace
That knows no ebb and flow
And with an attitude
That makes them look upon
Gold and earthenware
With no distinction,
These devotees long
To go on worshipping
With overflowing love,
Disdaining with fortitude
Emancipation, even.

(18)

Cēkkiḻār's metric dexterity

We now enter the *purāṇam* proper where Cēkkiḻār uses words and *viruttams* to set up the most vivid portraits; sometimes he catches the very movement of his characters. Cuntarar is about to get married (to the wrong person in God's eyes) and, remembering His promise to him in Mt. Kayilāya, Lord Siva now appears before him as an old man, tottering in his impetuous haste:

Urged on by the keen desire
To save His devotee from entanglement
The Lord came down in the garb of man,
The One beyond the reach of all,
Of Brahma and of Tirumāl too,
(Who flew skyward, dug below)
The Lord came down to the haunts of man
To claim His serf for His own service. (19)

Indeed the story of Cuntarar has been told with a verve that goes well with the nature of the saint himself. He was of a very independent nature, loth to bear refusal and denial of what he considered his rightful dues and very apt to speak his mind freely even to God. Indeed there is an aphorism in *Nārata Bhakti Sūtra* which says that not only love but all the emotions of the human heart should be shown, not in respect of worldly things, not against humans but against God. So, when one is angry, even anger should be directed against God, if one is a true devotee. This is in perfect accordance with the basic tenets of devotion; we develop emotions only against those with whom we have transactions. For instance against the millions of people in the world quite unknown to us, we have no emotions at all, neither love nor hatred. So it stands to reason that if you have relations, as a true devotee, only with God, then all your emotions will naturally be concerning Him. In the case of Cuntarar, he directs a lot of love in the form of friendship to God, but along

with it, considerable criticism of God's ways accompanied by sorrow and anger. Cēkkiḻār brings out all these aspects of a complex personality like Cuntarar's in efficient and elegant language.

The way poet traces the great conversion of the saint from a worldly-minded young man is very interesting and convincing. When God comes down in person to redeem him, he treats Him with contempt, calling him mad. When the old man shows him a palm leaf documents to prove that Cuntarar was indeed His serf, he tears it to pieces. The old man had to prove his case by showing the original of the document that had been kept safe in the temple. When finally Cuntarar realises who it was who was trying hard to make him His serf, he breaks down and most willingly becomes His devotee, servant and on his initiative, a friend.

The Lord asks him to use his powers of poesy and sing about him. Cuntarar is puzzled, asks Him how to begin. The Lord readily replies "You called me mad. Begin your first hymn with the word 'frenzied'!" So Cuntarar starts his "verbal worship" as the Lord Himself calls this singing of hymns and proceeds from temple to temple panegyrising Him in wonderful poetry. And the Lord drinks in all this and demands more of it. And, now and then, He irritates him on purpose so as to stir him to sing a whole decade of critical uncomplimentary hymns which He seems to have loved and treasured. The term used in the west "the best friend and the severest critic" seems to fit Cuntarar like a glove. And he is made to live up to the second part of this description frequently by the provocative acts of the Lord. We have already referred to the Lord's commissioning of his 'bhootas' to waylay Cuntarar and seize all the gold and gems he had received as presents from Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ. He makes him blind, then gives him back the sight in one eye and after many strongly-worded decades from the saint, restores full sight to him. He refuses him money and the saint-minstrel sings a hymn loaded with winged words on which the Lord presents him gold and

gems. The many passages (in more than one purāṇam) dealing with Cuntarar are some of the most interesting in the whole work.

The Campantar story

Cēkkiḻār has obviously the highest regard for Campantar for whom he devotes nearly half the work. The very first verse sets out the fundamental purposes to fulfill which Campantar cried that morning on the bund of the city's sacred pond:

He wept, opening his sacred infant's mouth
So that the Path, the Vedic Path might triumph
That the Saiva lore might win the hearts of men
That all the world might live abundant lives!
Let us cherish the sacred feet of the child
Campantar of Cīrkāḻi surrounded
By the coolest green fields, let's praise his ministry!

(20)

Then Cēkkiḻār takes us through all those wonderful spiritual adventures often involving miraculous happenings, always succouring the afflicted. His method everywhere is to describe the incident first and conclude with a colophon of the decade sung on the occasion. Campantar proceeds on his triumphant way, curing the princess of Maḻapāṭi of a deadly disease, raising the merchant youth and Pūmpāvai from the dead and vanquishing the Jain monks in Maturai.

It is remarkable that all through these wonderful triumphs and all through the growing popularity with the masses who worshipped him and followed him in their thousands wherever he went, Campantar continued to be a humble servant of God who won his victories in the sign of God. In Maturai before the Queen he states this position very clearly, saying that he will prove more than a match for the mean-minded Jain monks, if the Lord continues to bless him. Prosperity often proves more difficult to endure than adversity

as it turns the head; but to true men of spiritual maturity, these waves of pelf and distress make little difference, they are not allowed to disturb their equipoise.

The purāṇam on Appar

Cēkkiḻār narrates, in considerable detail, the story of the ministry of Appar whose name at birth was Maruḷnīkkiyār and who acquired the name Nāvukkaracar later on. He describes the many calamities that happened in Appar's early days leaving him and his elder sister alone in the world. Appar grows up, adopts Jainism and rises in the hierarchy of the cult to a position of preeminence with the name Tarumacēṉar. His sister prays fervently to Lord Siva who afflicts Appar with a terribly painful disease which the Jains are unable to cure by any means. Finding his torment insufferable Appar gives up Jainism and seeks anchorage in the Saiva cult. Tilakavatiyār, the devoted elder sister actively helps him in his journey back to the faith of their forefathers and is herself revered as one of the Saiva saints. Appar composes his first decade, one of the best he ever composed, making moving references to his terrible affliction and seeking relief from the Lord who blesses him with immediate cure. Appar becomes a totally dedicated devotee of Siva. His mental powers which made him master all the Jain scriptures and attain religious leadership in that cult now pushed him to the top of the Saiva cult.

There have been many scholarly theologians in the history of all religions; but most of them are cursed with two handicaps. One is an intellectual arrogance, an insufferable pride, occasioned by their glittering successes in the polemical field and the many enviable favours from crowned heads.The other is a lack of that burning faith, of that deep emotional attachment to God that true devotees have in abundant measure and scholars do not usually have. But, in the case of Appar it was a unique combination of profound scholarship, deep humility and the most sincere devotion to the Lord. Indeed his humility became such a characteristic of his that it coloured all the

hymns he sang and earned the classification of master-servant relationship for his kind of devotion. Not for him is the path of friendship with all its rights (including the right to criticise the Lord, often exercised) which Cuntarar made famous. The relationship favoured by Campantar is akin to that subsisting between father and son. The father has some rights (the fathers of those days had more of them) but the son too has some and is in a position of privilege in relation to the father. But the servant (again, of those days) has none, no rights at all and works at the pleasure of the master and is totally dependent on Him. There is a beautiful hymn composed by Appar pointing to the position of a true serf who has no right to expect anything from the master:

The Lord, the consort of Murukaṉ's mother,
Enshrined in the temple in South Kaṭampai,
Has this duty cast upon Him
Of providing succour even to me.
My only duty is to serve and wait ! (21)

Appar survives all the ordeals created by an adverse-minded king, through the grace of Lord Siva. He demonstrates to the Saiva world the virtues and the necessity of all devotees helping to keep the temples clean and usable, not by precept but through his own personal example. Armed with a small handy tool he went around removing prickly plants and pebbles in the open area in the temples used by devotees for circumambulation. The idea that the users of any institution have a responsibility for its maintenance, if put in practice today by the public will radically change the face of our public institutions including the roads and buses and railway trains. Appar was far in advance of the times in taking up this kind of social service. His message does not seem to have caught on even in our own enlightened times, as witness the doleful state of our temples and mutts and, in fact, all public institutions in the country. The user today has this firm conviction that their main-

tenance is the sole responsibility of the management; he would be surprised and annoyed to be told that he carries a big part of that load of responsibility himself.

Much of Appar's life is interlinked with that of Campantar. Appar was decades senior to the child saint but in his humility, he felt honoured to carry the latter's palanquin, as we have seen earlier. Appar was honoured by the saint who had never seen him earlier but had conceived great reverence for him. Appar's crowning achievement was that he could see Mount Kayilāya with the Lord and His consort taking the shape of well-mated couples from the bird and animal worlds, at Tiruvaiyāṟu; his *patikam* sung on that occasion is full of ecstasy and is one of the most beautiful in all *Tēvāram*.

Cēkkiḻār devotes only the space actually needed for each of the other (lesser) saints, no more. Actually there are *purāṇams* with 7 verses and many of the *purāṇams* have less than 20 verses. Cēkkiḻār goes strictly by what he could collect by way of factual particulars and does no padding where there is lack of material. There are *purāṇams* on groups of saints which have only one or two verses, even. There are no names in them only their single outstanding quality is mentioned - like "those that bow down as devotees" and "those that touch (God's) body three times a day" (the latter referring to those that worship God as nominated temple priests).

Against these we have, besides the long *purāṇams* on the famous trinity (mūvar), fairly long passages on Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār. Cēkkiḻār concludes the work with a description of Cuntarar getting on the back of the white elephant sent by God to bring him to Kayilāya. Cuntarar's story at no stage can ever be dull; we have a rich anecdote here, of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, unable to bear the separation from Cuntarar, mounting his horse and following his friend all the way to Kayilāya into which he is admitted on Cuntarar's intercession.

At this point we take leave of the *periyapurāṇam*, a great work marked by good poesy and total dedication of the poet to the subject matter. The work does not permit the poet to indulge in much character portrayal or display of much of creative imagination as it is a collection of biographies by a writer wedded to truth. Genrewise, it is a curious work, not exactly falling under the definition of an epic poem, except in point of its length and general tenor. Each *purāṇam* has a different hero, even though as we have seen, Cēkkiḻār makes a valiant attempt to present Cuntarar as the hero of the entire work. Cuntarar, obviously cannot have any relevance or wield any kind of influence over the large number of saints who lived and died before him, whose accounts may well occupy 2/3 of the entire poem. So the attempt to make Cuntarar the hero of the work is contrived and not natural and this takes away from the epic quality, as also the lack of the love element. While it is undeniably a very great work of piety, it cannot rank as a very typical epic poem, despite Cēkkiḻār's considerable poetic gifts.

The Two works on Naḷaṉ

Apart from works like Kampaṉ's and Villi's which told the entire story of the Sanskrit epics, there arose others which took for their material certain episodes from these Sanskrit sources. Out of them all, the story of Naḷaṉ told in the *Mahābhārata* has proved the most popular. Students of Sanskrit in the west regularly study the *Naḷōpākkiyāṉam* as part of their curricular studies and the western critics are fascinated by the rounded story of the *Upākkiyāṉam* involving the right degree of love, surprise, tragedy and adventure. It is not surprising that Tamil poets took to this story and wrote whole works on it as Sriharsa did in Sanskrit.

The first and far and away the more popular of the two poems on Naḷaṉ and Tamayanti is the *Naḷaveṇpā* of Pukaḻēnti. It is a small work in three cantos and 424 stanzas entirely in the *veṇpā* metre. As we shall see in the course of this discussion, it conforms

to the definition of an epic poem, more or less punctiliously, despite its short size and the fact that only one metre is employed throughout.

The epic, to start with, is very readable-which is more than what we can say of many Tamil (and for that matter Sanskrit) epics. There are no needless descriptions, there is little striving after verbal effects. Pukaḻēnti has a long story to tell and he tells it in less than 500 stanzas, without losing sight of the high points. Let us enjoy the poem by savouring a few examples. Describing the prosperous and ethical-minded denizens of the capital city of Naḷaṉ's, the poet says

The things that were crooked in Naḷa's capital
Were only the fearful bows.
Only the hair of the maidens twisted
Only their leg-ornaments
Cried out aloud; only the water
Got stirred up, cloudy, dull.
'Twas the eyes of girls in upper storeys
That strayed from the path that's narrow and straight

(22)

The implication is fairly clear-that in Naḷaṉ's capital city, people's minds were not crooked, there was no oppression making the citizens wail in distress. This is an eminently Tamil device but put to the best use by Pukaḻēnti in a neatly turned out verse.

The story proceeds briskly; love is cemented between Naḷaṉ and Tamayanti through the labours of a swan. A *Cuyamvaram* is arranged for and even though the gods are present in the hall, five of them in the garb of Naḷaṉ, Tamayanti is able to see through the deceit and to pick out the correct Naḷaṉ and garland him. Earlier the poet describes, through the words of the maid, the qualities of the various kings assembled there, eagerly expecting Tamayanti to

choose each of them; though the fertility of each of the countries comes in for a great deal of hyperbole, the stanzas are well turned out and pleasing to read.

Then, owing to the frustration caused to Kali, the evil-doer that Naḷa<u>n</u> had won the heart of the girl he himself wished dearly to marry, troubles come to Naḷa<u>n</u> in quick succession. Naḷa<u>n</u> gambles and loses all; in fact it is for this similarity that this story is told to Taruma<u>n</u> in the forest by an ascetic. The poet describes how the royal pelf left Naḷa<u>n</u> and went under the control of his opponent:

Just as the lecher
Leaves his spouse
Loyal and faithful
For the public woman
That's bought and sold,
Kingly pelf left
Naḷa<u>n</u> the truthful
For his opponent
The moral pigmy.

(227) (23)

The loser leaves the city accompanied only by the faithful Tamayanti, and the children, bemoaned by all the people. Naḷa<u>n</u> undergoes all kinds of trouble, leaves Tamayanti at one stage and his personality changed radically through a snake bite, enters the service of a king as a charioteer, while Tamayanti goes to her parents' palace. Eventually they are reunited through a stratagem thought up by Tamayanti, of another *Cuyamvaram* to which kings are invited and Naḷa<u>n</u> also appears as the charioteer of king. Tamayanti sends her children to him to test her suspicion that he indeed is Naḷa<u>n</u> and the mental state of the father at seeing his children after so long a time is described in an evocative verse. Naḷa<u>n</u> gets back his former shape and colour and is reunited with his wife and sons. *Kali* gives him a boon as a compensation for all the trouble he had put him

to; the boon is to the effect that those who hear Naḷaṉ's story will not suffer the anguish served up by the malignant demi-god. He then wins back all that he had lost earlier, through the same means, i.e. gambling and rules the country wisely and well.

Pukaḻēnti tells the story in such a way that the interest is sustained till the end. His poetical skill is of a high order and the story is full of human interest. The usual bane of all epics, of poor characterisation applies to this too; the hero and the heroine are paragons of virtue and beauty and the others do not count at all. While Pukaḻēnti is very adopt at handling this *veṇpā* metre, it must be said that the *veṇpā* with its air of finality suits as the medium of ethical teaching better than for continuous narration involving the delineation of varied sentiments.

From the viewpoint of the student of the genre, this work can certainly be classified as an epic poem. Even though short (and happily no stipulations regarding length have been made in *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram)*, it has all the elements listed in the grammar as the essential ingredients of an epic poem-a treatment of the four fundamental purposes of man in this world, a delineation of all the rasas and, to reinforce the sense of repletion, a description of different types of scenes and episodes like childbirth, the rising and setting of the sun and the moon and such like. The over-punctilious critic may demur saying that the movements of an army and its triumph have not been depicted in this. But, surely, the list in the *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram* is not mandatory; it must be taken only as illustrative. And though every epic has a variety of metres in it, this is luckily not stipulated by Taṇṭi as a necessary condition, nor is the length. Hence Pukaḻēnti's work certainly deserves classification as an epic poem.

The *Naiṭatam* of Ativīrarāmapāṇṭiyaṉ is a longer work using a variety of metres and is a more orthodox kind of epic poem and perhaps for that reason and for the reason of its pedantic language

has always been a greater favourite with the pundit class than with the dilettante. The author was a ruling prince who acquired a number of titles during the course of his career, some owing to his prowess in the battlefield and the others to his mastery of the Tamil language. There is a legend too that he administered corporal punishment to aspiring poets who were proved inadequate in their command of the language. He is said to have flourished towards the end of the 16th cent. His work has 1172 stanzas cast in the different kinds of *viruttam*.

In this poem, the poet has followed the well-established conventions of epic poetry and indulged himself through long passages, some of which have been done well but all of which are convention-ridden. For instance he devotes a whole *paṭalam* to a description of Tamayanti's love-lorn condition fully exploiting all the well-worn concepts of his predecessors. This is followed by another *paṭalam* describing her torments at the onset of evening and three more devoted to the rise of the moon and the harassed lady upbraiding it and the god of love! However in a somewhat distinctive stanza, the sun is described as setting on the day prior to the *Cuyamvaram*, being afraid that the fire of passion for Tamayanti that was burning up even the gods from the heavens and the crowned kings of the earth might affect him (the sun) too. The poem proceeds in this languid fashion till calamities begin to visit Naḷan̲, after which the poet appears to be in a hurry to complete it in the fewest possible verses. The first part occupies 880 verses while the second part beginning with the appearance of *Kali* and involving a lot of story material is allotted only 293, showing a very distorted sense of proportion. This justifies the legend that the poet's sister-in-law (quite a learned person, herself) compared the poem to a hunting dog which goes forth to the hunt with a great deal of enthusiasm but returns home tired out, listless. Genrewise, this is an even more typical epic poem than the better-

executed *Naḷaveṇpā* as this fulfils all the conditions laid down by the grammarian (even a battle is described) and the length is of respectable epic proportions and a variety of metres used.

The Islamic and Christian Kāppiyams

It is now proposed to discuss the more important Islamic and Christian literature in Tamil, here in this chapter. Though message-wise these works should properly come up for study in the next chapter, devoted to the religious literature in Tamil, this being a work on genres, it is proposed to discuss them here. For, even though their motif is wholly religious, their authors have designed them more or less on the lines of *kāppiyams*, not of *purāṇams*; and, they should be judged as *kāppiyams* in accord with the principles of genre criticism. Their overweening religious flavour cannot, of course, be brushed aside but kept in view and accorded due importance during the course of the criticism.

In the case of the Hindu works, the chronological order of advent was that bhakti hymns of the *Tēvaram* and *Tivviyappirapantam* preceded by a considerable margin the composition ol organically united whole works like the *kāppiyams* and *purāṇams*. But, in the case of Muslim and Christian works, the *kāppiyam* type came to be composed earlier than the hymnal type. The reason for this is clear; at the time Islam came in a big way to the Tamil land (which was after 1000A.D.) the current fashion in that area was to write long, organically united *kāppiyams*; the hymnists like the Nāyaṉmār and Āḻvārs were dimly defined figures of the past. Hence works like the *Ciṟāppurāṇam* came to be written first, to be followed by hymns after the model of *Tiruppukaḻ* and philosophical songs of the type of Tāyumāṉavar's songs as well as a large number of minor pirapantams like *piḷḷait tamiḻ* works on Islamic themes. Christian literary effort, too, followed a similar pattern.

The Ciṟāppurāṇam

The *Ciṟāppurāṇam* composed by Umaṟuppulavar in the 17th century A. D. is the oldest and easily the most important of the Islamic literary works in Tamil. It is an account of Prophet Muhammad's life and mission rendered in the Tamil *kāppiyam* genre with descriptions of nadu and nagar and of the many ingredients listed in *Taṇṭiyalaṅkāram*, with detailed portraits of places and of the main characters and delineation of the major sentiments, through all of which the poet's devotion to Islam and reverence for the prophet run like a golden thread.

Umaṟu was patronised by the celebrated philanthropist Citakkāti which is the Tamilised version of Sheikh Khadir. The Ciṟā consists of 5027 stanzas in 3 cantos and was left incomplete, a later poet completing the work. The poet Umaṟu's mastery of Tamil literary traditions and his scholarship in Tamil and command over the many verse forms together with his profound knowledge of the teachings of the *Kurāṉ* and the episodes in the life of the Prophet and his sayings are truly amazing. It can truly be said that Umaṟu pioneered a new class of literature which can be termed Islamic Tamil; its variety and size are quite imposing; there are nearly a hundred works coming under this category with *kāppiyams* and minor *pirapantams* in a wide range and hymns and philosophical songs going to demonstrate their wide variety.

Now let us enjoy a few passages from the Ciṟā. The poet was obviously an admirer of Tiruttakka Tēvar and Kampaṉ and the influence of their poetry is to be found everywhere in the Ciṟā. Umaṟu makes the fullest use of nature to beautify his stanzas, at the same time underlining the chief facets of character of his hero, the prophet Muhammed. All this is seen to advantage in a stanza where, the poet says, the prophet, refusing to be distracted by the beauties of nature looked with compassion at a deer that had been pinned to a

spot by the net of a hunter and was in considerable anguish. He says,

He had no eyes for the flowery bower
Oozing with sweet and viscous honey.
The waterfalls on the hills could not
Distract his attention nor was he
Attracted by the welcoming shade
Or by the date palm showering fruits.
He kept looking at the plight of the deer,
The merciful one, the inveterate giver,
And walked towards it, eager to help

(Nūpavattu Kāṇṭam, Mā̱nukkuppiṇai ni̱nṟa paṭalam - 7) (24)

It may be seen how, incidentally, the poet endows the desert regions of Arabia with the fertility of the Tamil land. In a similar way Kampa̱n painted Kōcala country as an extension of the Kāviri basin.

Umaṟu has described the love of Khadija for the prophet in the best Tamil tradition perfected by poets like Kampa̱n; in several verses in the *'paṭalam'* where the dream of Khadija is described, the burgeoning love in her heart and the helpless condition in which it places her are vividly portrayed. The cosmetic articles and the ornaments she shows a distaste for in her present condition are all what a Tamil girl used to favour; not all of them will apply to an Arab girl; but Umaṟu is a true Tamil poet deeply schooled in Tamil traditions and for him what applies to the Tamil land applies with equal force everywhere.

There is an interesting episode in the *Hijuratuk Kāṇṭam* with a fine moral taught through it. A wolf was pursuing a deer in Mecca and was about to catch it when it entered the temple area called "haram" where no blood could be shed. The wolf too appeared to appreciate the ancient Arab prohibition and stopped short of the

area. Three Meccans who were inimical to the prophet expressed surprise at the intelligent and restrained way animals could behave.

The wolf started speaking to them and at the outset, they expressed even greater surprise that an animal could speak like men. The wolf said, "You think all this is surprising. But to me the greatest surprise is that after Allah had sent His own Messenger to you armed with the Scripture, the *Kurān̲* to succour all of humanity, you still refuse to accept all this and willingly go down to perdition. The world does not have a greater wonder to show than this." But these words of wisdom have the very opposite effect on the unbelievers and they persevere in their evil ways and come to no good at all. The story is well told and the teaching convincingly conveyed through the words of the wolf.

The work offers a certain difficulty to the reader not versed in Arabic as Arabic words are Tamilised and used in it along with the usual high diction of classical poetry. But there are good commentaries available and the present writer feels *Cir̲āppurāṇam* deserves to be better read by Muslims and non-Muslims too, as a religious and ethical guide and as a good poem capable of yielding aesthetic delight.

The Tēmpāvaṇi

The first notable Christian Tamil work is *Tēmpāvani* composed early in the 18th century by Vīramāmun̲ivar, the Tamil name assumed by Fr. Beschi an Italian priest who came to India and mastered the language and literature of the Tamils and trained himself to compose poetry in it, observing all the established Tamil literary traditions. The work in 3615 stanzas tells the story of Joseph and Mary in the manner of a *kāppiyam*. The poet himself claims that he used 96 metres in his work. Though the poet draws heavily on the poetic conceits in Kampan̲'s immortal classic, he has woven many original and striking word-portraits and innovative poetic concepts in this.

There are many enjoyable passages in the work not only from the religions but even from the literary viewpoint. The Jewish warriors clamour for an invasion of Jericho but their leader Joshua calms them down saying, "It is not a difficult undertaking , this taking of Jericho by a feat of arms. It will fall to us the moment we arrive there. But we shall win over the city without use of arms through the grace of God. You shall soon see that happen!". And it did turn out that way for a miracle happened, the wall of the rampart broke into two, allowing the Jewish army to pour into the city and take it without firing an arrow.

In another passage, the very sounds of war could be heard in the *muṉivar*'s poetry when he describes the onslaught of Joshua's army on the enemy. There are a few such scenes where inevitably the clash of arms has to be portrayed and the *muṉivar* performs the task with distinction. But as Dr. John Samuel states in his analysis of *Tēmpāvaṇi*, the work is more concerned with the conflict between Christian and non-Christian ideals which is spiritual, not physical. Hence the poet devotes a lot of space to the narration of episodes and a discussion of the spiritual positions taken by Jesus, Joseph and Mary. In fact, the *muṉivar* gets so engrossed with these that the modern student will find the work a little tedious. G. U. Pope was very right in his summing up of the work that "the student will find some fine passages but as a whole it is monotonous." But so are many Hindu works on religion where there is an earnest attempt to give a lot of religious counsel; this would be realised by the student who goes through many of the Hindu *purāṇams* and *talapurāṇams*, especially. The only difference that a genre critic would insist on emphasising is that while the latter are frankly works of religious value and their literary quality is incidental. *Tēmpāvaṇi* is constructed on the lines of a *kāppiyam*, even though not all the ingredients of Taṇṭi are found here; and as a *kāppiyam*, it should be interesting to read and it should not too obviously try to preach. A

humorist said that there is an eleventh commandment, not postulated by Moses, but one of the utmost importance to all artists; and that is "Thou shalt not be dull." To the extent to which the *munivar*'s *kāppiyam* transgresses this commandment, its merit gets devalued despite the many excellences with which it is replete.

The Iraṭcaṇiya Yāttirīkam

The second great *kāppiyam* in Tamil by a Christian poet is the *Iraṭcaṇiya Yāttirīkam*, composed by Henry A. Krishna Pillai in the second half of the 19th century, based on John Bunyon's Pilgrim's progress.

The work records the imagined progress of a pilgrim Christian who travels physically to the land of bliss after passing through all kinds of dangers; this is an allegory and is regarded in the original as a book of considerable sanctity; the Tamil version has come to occupy a similar position among Tamil Christians. Apart from its undoubted religious value, it has many fine passages of literary merit. Indeed Piḷḷai must be given quite a high place in the hierarchy of Tamil poets. His poetically evocative diction, his easy mastery over the metres, his striking ability to present word portraits, his elevated style of expression all mark him out as a poet of rare distinction.

One of the early passages in the *Ātiparuvam* is noteworthy; it describes the state of the world as seen through Jesus' eyes. Here is one of the vignettes:

The truest servants of God lack lustre,
They're devoid of brightness like fireflies
While hypocrites shine to advantage.
The good elements in the society
Are crowded out by the evil-minded
Even like the paddy by the weeds in the field !

(55 - Āti paruvam) *(25)*

When noting that the sun had set on the momentous day when Jesus had been crucified, the poet makes use of this occasion to shade the factual statement with the appropriate emotion (of sorrow); for he says "The sun could not bear the evil done by man to that compassionate one who had come down to save mankind and contracting his rays in his anguish he fell on his back in the western sea."

There is a passage in the fourth or the *Āraṇiya paruvam* where the pilgrims see a fertile piece of land to which led a path branching off from their road to heaven. There is a slight hesitation whether to take this branch route and they consult each other on the advisability of following it. But such is the power of the promise of pelf to poor mortals that they all take the branching road forgetting that such temptations make a mockery of human desires leading them to terrible deprivation here and in the hereafter. They are finally rescued when they pray to God; the prayer songs in the work are no small part of its sublime appeal; they are based on the *Tēvāram* and are actually termed *Tēvāram* here.

This work of 3766 stanzas which follows Bunyan in regard to the matter and Kampaṉ in presentation is one that needs to be studied by all lovers of Tamil. The only blemish in this work is its total lack of the love sentiment which forms the staple in the other *kāppiyams* and which is regarded universally as the queen of all sentiments.

Chapter Six

THE GENRE OF RELIGIOUS POEMS

The Kantapurāṇam

The three most important of the vast body of Hindu religio-literary works in Tamil undoubtedly are the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Kantapurāṇam* and the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. For the deeply religious-minded Tamil, these three are scriptures and their words revered as sacred and beyond the pale of criticism. Of these, the *Kantapurāṇam* has a peculiar pre-eminence on account of the unique hold of the Murukaṉ over the Tamils. Indeed, there is a flourishing sect called Kavumāram where Murukaṉ is worshipped as *Absolute* Divinity far outstripping Lord Siva, His father; this sect is very popular in the south and is almost unknown in the north. In many ways, Murukaṉ is a Tamil God and the *Kantapurāṇam* is eminently a Tamil story. For one thing, the six earthly bivouacs of His are all situated in Tamil Nadu. For another, the story of His elopement with Vaḷḷi, the girl from the mountain tribe is uniquely Tamil and hundreds of similar episodes have been told in *Caṅkam* love lyrics of the '*kuṟiñci*' mode.

The *Kantapurāṇam* is a detailed work in six cantos and over ten thousand verses. It tells the story of how Lord Murukaṉ came into being specifically to save the world from the terrible might of the *asuras* headed by Cūrapatumaṉ, how He made war on him and routed him in many fierce encounters and how finally the '*asura*' was divided into two forms, those of a peacock and a cock which were adopted by the Lord to serve Him as a vehicle and the flag respectively. It also narrates the stories of how He wedded Teyvaṉyāṉai daughter of Intiraṉ and Vaḷḷi daughter of a mountain chieftain, the

latter wedding being in the traditional Tamil manner of an elopement preceding the formal betrothal.

The broad outline of the story is available from the oldest Tamil works composed during the *Caṅkam* period. However Kacciyappa Civācāriyar, the famed author of the work took his details from the Sanskrit Purāṇa the *Skantam*. It can be stated without any fear of dissent that the Tamil work far surpasses the Sanskrit original in quality. While the *Kantapurāṇam* can rank as a respectable work of literature interesting to read and with many features that are sure to please the dilettante, the Sanskrit original written faithfully following the lines of other Sanskrit purāṇas is insufferably dull with no literary qualities to command it.

The Talented Author

Kacciyappar belonged to the 12th Century A.D. thus ranking as Kampaṉ's junior by a short span of time. Their relative chronology is of considerable interest as we find a great number of similarities in the two works which cannot be put down to accident. If, as it is most likely to be, Kacciyappar came after Kampaṉ, he owes a big debt to his brilliant predecessor from whom he has taken more than " a ladleful" (Kampaṉ is credited by legend to have admitted that he took a ladleful from his predecessor, Tiruttakka Tēvar).

Among the striking similarities are: there are three brothers in both the enemy camps, the one sister, Acamuki in *Kantapurāṇam* and Cūrppaṇakai in the *Rāmāyaṇam* are responsible for the total ruin of the whole clan Ciṅkamukaṉ talks very much like Vipīṭaṇaṉ and is ethical and noble-minded like him, Vīravāku and Anumaṉ are somewhat similar as the trusted messengers of the hero, even the sentiments expressed by Cūraṉ and Rāvaṇaṉ when things were going against them are very comparable. As T.S Eliot would have it (in his Tradition and Individual Talent), later poets make good use

of the material from earlier poetry and it is no reflection on them unless they fail to display any innovative talent. Kacciyappar was beyond doubt an original poet and instances of his innovative genius are seen everywhere in his work.

Kampa<u>n</u> and Kacciyappar

The similarities are certainly remarkable; but the differences between the two works are of a fundamental nature. Even the approach is radically different. Kampa<u>n</u> was pre-eminently a poet and his aim was to compose a poem; Kacciyappar was a deeply religious person and his aim was to present the Tamils with a *purāṇam.* This is not to disparage the poetic gifts of Kacciyappar which are considerable. This is only to emphasise how fundamentally different their basic objectives were. Unfortunately this question of literary judgment that must be solely based on aesthetic criteria has got confused with plenty of emotion and bias confounding it on account of Saiva-Vaiṇava sectarian differences.

Using purely literary criteria, he who runs may read how effectively Kampa<u>n</u> makes his hero human in all places where it matters; and unless the hero is human, it is extremely difficult for the poet to transfer his emotions to the reader; identification of the reader with the hero becomes easy if the hero is presented as essentially human. Kampa<u>n</u> walked a tight rope when he was confronted with the problem of showing Rāma as incarnate God (for that was the firmly-held belief of the people) and again as essentially human; how successful he has been is the measure of the greatness of his poem.

Kacciyappar had no such problem before him; his hero Muruka<u>n</u> is every inch a God and he cannot be humanised. The Muruka<u>n</u> cult, called *Kavumāram* had taken deep roots in the Tamil land and no poet, not every one of the calibre and status of Kacciyappar could lightly deal with a popular God by presenting Him as a human with

human weaknesses. Rāma had a personal loss to mourn, Murukaṉ did not and could not have any personal loss, He was fighting for a cause, the cause of the Dēvas. Indeed, far from attempting to humanise his hero, Kacciyappar presents Murukaṉ as the Supreme Deity, higher than the Trinity. Tirumāl, one of the Trinity, praises Murukaṉ as the Absolute, who is the origin of the Trinity itself who came down to benefit the world, in the form of a six-headed God.

Murukaṉ, in fact, is portrayed as the most formidable warrior of the classic age who constantly performs incredible miracles in war and peace. With His adversary too delighting in the performance of mind-boggling miracles and even His messenger displaying his divine origin through his supernatural feats, the whole work breathes the air of a *purāṇam* with not a shred of realism in it. It would therefore be quite wrong and, indeed, unfair to Kacciyappar, if we apply the criteria of a literary work to this *purāṇam*.

Its literary flavour

It is one thing to say that the *Kantapurāṇam* is not a literary work and quite another to aver that there are a number of beautiful passages of high literary flavour in it. The former is a question of basic objectives; with such a hero and with his own strongly entrenched devotion Kacciyappar could not have composed a literary work. But being gifted with a formidable array of literary talents, he has made it a very interesting *purāṇam* with many passages of undoubtedly literary flavour. Let us savour a few of them.

The gods under Intiraṉ sorely beset by the powerful asuras realise that they need a gifted commander to defeat the enemy in battle; and knowing that such a commander should be a son of Lord Siva and Pārvati, they urge the god of love to let fly his arrows at Him to generate the feelings of love in the forbidding God. Mataṉ agrees and proceeds to do this fearsome job; the poet muses how, when the moment of death is near, people take decisions to make

it easy for the god of death to seize them for his victims. For he was certain to die at the hands of the Lord whose ire is easy to rouse, whose smile burnt down the three flying cities.

The God of love gets burnt by the fire from the Lord's eyes. Then Pārvati, deeply in love with Him proceeds to perform penance. The Lord goes to her in the guise of an old man and proceeds to deride the Lord saying, "His garment is the raw skin of animals. His vehicle is an ox. His ornaments are snakes and the skulls from the cremation ground. He eats poison for his food. His residence is the burning ghat. You are young and handsome. Why do you perform penance to marry this unsuitable person?". He goes on speaking ill of Him in several interesting stanzas till he is stopped by an indignant Pārvati who tries to send him away. But now the old man proceeds to say something which puts all his earlier diatribe in the shade; for he makes an unambiguous statement that he wishes to marry her!

Pārvati is shocked and proceeds to cry in vexation. But the Lord now presents Himself surrounded by His attendants and proposes marriage the very day. The wedding is celebrated in due style. But the Dēvas were disappointed that their prayer was yet remaining unfulfilled; they send Vāyu to beseech the Lord and He produces Murukan̲ from His own being. The prayer Vāyu utters before the Lord is cast in an elevated style and constitutes beautiful poetry. We can savour a stanza out of this:

Our eyes do not
Register your form.
You cannot be all
Contained in the words
Of our puny prayers,
Even our thoughts
Do not encompass you.
We cannot dispel

You from our thoughts,
Nor can we, Lord,
Make out a thing
In the fabric of your
Impenetrable illusion. (1)

Some note-worthy features of the work

The story of Murukaṉ's advent is told in an absorbing series of word-portraits. Born as six babies out of the sparks of fire emanating from the Lord, He is nurtured by the Kiruttika deities in the pool called Saravaṇa and is united into one by the loving Mother, Pārvati and is named Skanta ("brought together" in Sanskrit). The child of a ruddy complexion seated between the milk-white Siva and the dark-hued Pārvati looks, to the poet, like evening time transposed between the day and the night.

The Godchild's pranks at a cosmic level are described with loving gusto. When He grows up to the age when he can bear the mantle, He is deputed by Lord Siva to assume the post of Commander-in-chief of the Dēva army. Murukaṉ, wishing to dispel the doubts that the Dēvas had about His adequacy to lead them in a war with the redoubtable *'asuras'*, creates conditions where the Dēvas make war on him and get defeated and slain. They are then brought back to life and to them He shows His cosmic form where the astonished Dēvas see the whole universe and even the Trinity embedded in it. Repentant and ashamed of their obtuseness, they accept Him as their revered commander and plans for the great war are formulated.

But before the war, in true purāṇic fashion, the author inserts a number of episodes all calculated to impress the reader with the valour, wisdom and leadership of Murukaṉ. In one of them He punishes the Creator for his ignorance of the *"Piraṇava mantiram"* and ends up teaching His own father.

He then kills Tārakan̲ and Kiravun̄can̲ who practised a great deal of magic in the war with Him. The great army of the Dēvas then moves under Murukan̲'s captaincy and after a futile messenger episode, war begins between the two hosts.

All the great epic poems and *'purāṇas'* in India centre round great wars which are described in tiresome detail by all the poets. Even Kampan̲ seems to have lost his sense of proportion in devoting nearly 42% of his great work on the war in Ilaṅkai. The war in *Kantapurāṇam* is bigger, fiercer and occupies greater space than the *Rāmāyaṇam* conflict. There is little difference in these descriptions: for everywhere, the 'agni astra' is destroyed by the 'rain-astra' and the 'brahma astra' checkmates everything. Hence we shall gloss over the interminable war passages and study the interesting ones which reveal human nature and provide opportunities to the poet to display his innovative talent.

Cūran̲'s brother Ciṅkamukan̲ is a person with a strong moral sense. He is unafraid to offer unpleasant counsel to his fiery brother, being sure that Murukan̲ is the Absolute Principle by whose boy-like incarnation, Cūran̲ has been deceived into thinking light of Him. But when his advice is rejected by his brother, he goes forth to battle and works havoc in the Dēva ranks with his valour and his great powers of magic till he is quelled by the *kuḷisam* (the thunder-bolt) in the fight with the Dēva's commander. Ciṅkamukan̲ is shown in two different moods; earlier in the calmer surroundings of the palace he is able to think of ethical considerations; but in the boiling air of the battlefield, his pugnacity quite overcomes his moral sense and he breathes only malevolence at the Lord whom he had earlier described as the Absolute Deity. It was not, however, the Lord's intention to kill him. He is routed in battle and sent to Parācakti to serve as Her vehicle.

In the war with Cūran̲, there are occasions when the reader wonders if the *asura* overlord will eventually win and Murukan̲ be

defeated. Such is Cūraṉ's prowess, such are his supernatural powers. But Murukaṉ matches him in physical valour and in magical powers and overwhelms him. At one stage Cūraṉ is so much impressed with the all-round superiority of his foeman, he is provoked to speak reverentially of him; his speech is mingled with a sense of wonder that his customary arrogance has left him now and an enlightenment pervades all his personality. He is rapturous that he has been able to see the Lord of the universe in physical form. But, ultimately his base nature asserts itself, his ego prevents his surging urge to bow in worship before his foe.

So Cūraṉ goes forth and after further bouts of magical deeds gets routed by Murukaṉ's javelin; he takes the form of a peacock and a cock which are cured of their malevolence by a compassionate glance from the Lord who accepts them in his services. The poet muses wonderingly what power the Lord's glance can have even over the most hate-filled personalities:

However evil, if men would stand
In the path of grace of Kumaraṉ's glance,
They get cleansed, they attain to
The highest seat of endless bliss.
If proof of this is needed, still,
Look at the glory, the endless grace
That the Son of Magic acquired now
After battling the Lord in obstinate hate. (2)

The Lord releases all the imprisoned Dēvas and restores his lost kingdom to Intiraṉ, who, in gratitude, gives his daughter Teyvayāṉai in marriage to Him. Then follows His wedding with Vaḷḷi which merits a somewhat detailed study.

Vaḷḷi's wedding

Vaḷḷi was born to a deer which left the child in a depression caused by the hill women digging out *Vaḷḷi* tubers and thus got her

name from them. Nampi, the mountain chieftain who did not have a girl child discovered her and took her home and brought her up with the deepest affection. In her twelfth year she was sent to guard the millet crop, as was the custom among the mountain folk. Murukaṉ comes there as a mountain chieftain at the urging of Nārata and love is instantly born; in fact, even before this meeting Vaḷḷi had heard about Him and had decided to marry none but Him. And the Lord knew that she had been born in the earth, only to wed him. But love is born in the millet field in accord with the well-established Tamil practice without the knowledge of the elders. Murukaṉ starts off with a question expressing disapproval of the action of her elders in commissioning her to guard the fields-a duty wholly incommensurate with her delicacy of body and beauty of person. Vaḷḷi is too bashful to reply. Murukaṉ talks on but suddenly, the noise of the chieftain Nampi coming with his attendants is heard. Murukaṉ instantly becomes a *vēṅkai* tree. The attendants who know their jungle like the palm of their hands are surprised at a brand new tree appearing where there was none. Their suspicions are fortunately stilled and they leave after a while.

Murukaṉ reappears in human form and importunes her with repeated entreaties to accept him. Hereabouts Kacciyappar shows Murukaṉ as a human lover with all the doubts and anxieties of a youth in that condition. Vaḷḷi points out the great gulf between them and asks how the high-born can wed a low-caste hunter girl.

As they are talking, Nampi is heard coming again and Murukaṉ takes the form of an old man; Nampi actually hands over Vaḷḷi to his care. When he leaves, the old man begins to talk words of love to her and is sternly rejected by an irate Vaḷḷi. Vināyaka, Murukaṉ's elder brother appears there as an elephant and Vaḷḷi now finds she needs the help of the old man whose advances she had so unceremoniously rejected moments earlier. The elephant disappears and Murukaṉ shows to Vaḷḷi His true form.

Before Her stood the divine form
Of the Lord of Beings, on a peacock seated,
With shoulders twelve, six heads on them,
Armed with a javelin and kulisam, too.
And the sight of the Lord so thrilled the girl
Of mountain folk, she shook all over,
With love and reverence boiling up,
And perspiring with the thrill of the meeting
She bowed, she prayed, she struggled to find
Words with which to speak her feelings. (3)

He leaves in due season and she returns to the raised platform from which she begins to drive the parrots away. But her friend notices the changes in her brought about by her new feelings of love and quickly learns the facts. As in the *Caṅkam* poems she is saucy, curious and talkative but totally devoted to the heroine whose interests she advances with a single-minded purpose. In fact it is she who arranges for an elopement and brings Vaḷḷi to the rendezvous from where Murukaṉ claims her.

The young fugitives speed away but comes the morning when the hunters under Nampi discover their loss and hurry after them and catch them. Vaḷḷi is perturbed but at the sound of Murukaṉ's faithful cock on his flag crowing, they all fall dead. However, at Nārata's intervention, Murukaṉ brings them back to life through Vaḷḷi and consents to a proper wedding at Nampi's request. Vaḷḷi assumes her divine form (for she is actually the daughter of Tirumāl and Ilakkumi) and the wedding takes place. The newly-weds spend sometime in Tiruttaṇi and then proceed to Kantakiri near Mount Kayilāyam where Vaḷḷi meets her cowife Teyvāyāṉai and is received by her with affection. Murukaṉ explains to them the facts of their former life in which they had been sisters, the daughters of Tirumāl; they had performed penance in order to marry Murukaṉ and had been born as Intiraṉ's daughter and a hill folk girl and eventually

had their desires fulfilled. The *purāṇam* comes to a close at this point.

A literary estimate of the work

Kacciyappar's scholarship and versifying ability are of the highest class and his *purāṇam* is favourite reading matter for all students of Tamil. His talent in portraying emotion-filled situations is as great as his skill in the quick narration of the story. With consummate ease he can describe battles and present the highest philosophical wisdom, making the transition without effort. Indeed, he creates innumerable opportunities to unfold the greatness of Murukan͟ who, to him is the One God of Whom even the Trinity is but offspring.

It should be borne in mind that Kacciyappar took on himself the job of composing the most authoritative *purāṇam* on Murukan͟ the favourite God of the Tamils; he did not intend to write a *kāppiyam*. Hence proper genre criticism should take this basic objective into consideration and examine the work as a *purāṇam* and not as a '*kāppiyam*'. A '*purāṇam*', according to the Sanskritists who invented the genre, should unfold the origin of creation, cosmmogony, man's ultimates destiny; it should contain accounts of gods and holy places and holy pieces of water; it should contain guidelines for man to avoid committing sin and for urging him to perform virtuous acts; through '*aṟam*' it should lead him on to emancipation, the highest objective of man on earth.

Kacciyappar has no difficulty in fulfilling these requirements as he had before him the *Skantapurāṇam* in Sanskrit as his model. But the Tamil poet would be found to have elevated the tone of the work much above that of the Sanskrit original which is bogged down for the most part in trivial details of daily conduct and mindless rituals and mechanical forms of worship. He has infused the story of Vaḷḷi's wedding with real authenticity, being inspired by the *kuṟiñci*

songs of the *Cankam* poets more than by the author of the *Skantam.* The *Kantapurāṇam* in Tamil not only fulfils the requirements of the *purāṇam* genre, it makes joyful reading for the most part for the lover of literature, too.

The Tiruviḷaiyāṭar purāṇam

The *purāṇam* next in importance to the *Kantapurāṇam* is the one describing Siva's playful acts of grace and compassion called the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭar purāṇam.* There are at least four works dealing with such playful acts of Siva, the *Tiru Ālavāy Tiruvilaiyāṭal purāṇam,* the *Kaṭampavaṉa purāṇam,* the *Cuntara Pāṇṭiyam* and the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭar purāṇam* of Parañcōti muṉivar. The best and the most important of these is the last mentioned and it would be enough if we study this work in reasonable detail here.

Parañcōti muṉivar's work is great because of its elevated devotional content and fairly satisfactory literary level maintained throughout; but its value as a historical document is very doubtful. To give but one instance, the poet has narrated some sports of the Lord connected with Campantar, after those connected with Māṇikkavācakar who came many centuries after the great *Tēvāram* hymnist. But this weakness in the field of chronology is endemic in India and the *muṉivar* is not the only one affected. So he can be forgiven this and his work can be studied for its primary worth as a devotional piece and secondarily for its literary merits.

The first part of the work is the *Maturaik kāṇṭam* where the circumstances in which the Lord married Mīṉāṭci are narrated with the tempo of a modern novel of action. Mīṉāṭci is born as a Pāṇṭiya princess and her parents bring her up, not as a shrinking violet, timid and bashful, but rather like a prince well-trained in the martial arts. She is born with three breasts and astrologers presage the disappearance of the third breast the moment she sees her future husband and feels bashful before him.

Mīṉāṭci goes out to conquer the whole world. None can stand before her in battle and far from feeling bashful, she is formidable in the field and her triumphant military career goes on unchecked till she comes to Kayilāya. The moment she sees the Lord, she feels bashful and totally feminine and the extra breast disappears. Love is born between them and the Lord comes to Maturai and marries the princess. The *muṉivar* describes the wedding with ecstasy and notes how the divine pair ruled over the Pāṇṭiya kingdom in an exemplary manner.

The second is the *Kūṭaṟkāṇṭam* where the sixty four sporting deeds are described. Many of them make interesting reading and can be enjoyed as brightly polished little stories, each self-contained, complete in itself. The main quality of the Lord that comes in for repeated emphasis here is his ineffable compassion not only for man but even for beasts like the ungainly pig. It is customary to picture Siva as a terrible God whose wrath is easily roused; here we see portrayed the matchless affection He can show to those in trouble.

The third is the *Tiru Ālavāyk Kāṇṭam.* It can be seen that all the three cantos are named after the city which is the theatre of His operations. This is where the *Tamiḻ Caṅkam* the celebrated assemblage of poets is described; in this the overwhelming love of the language of the poet is fully displayed.

Parañcōti muṉivar is very good at drawing verbal portraits. One of the many such in the work is where the Goddess in the form of a Pāṇṭiyaṉ princess stands face to face with her future husband, Lord Siva. Till that moment her valour and reckless bravery in the teeth of enemy onslaught has been praised; but, at that moment, her extra breast suddenly vanishes and she stands, the erstwhile scourge of foemen, now the very picture of drooping feminine bashfulness, looking rather like a creeper carrying blossoms, her fish-like eyes looking at her feet and her toe-nail scratching the earth-the very personification of effeminacy adorned by a timid shyness.

In a similar manner the poet draws memorable pictures of people in tense situations-not always Gods and kings but ordinary people like the bangle seller hawking his wares in the streets of Maturai, the boy-saint Campantar vanquishing the other religionists and the old woman making and selling an edible from rice flour (piṭṭu) who sends the Lord as her representative to perform physical work carrying earth in baskets on the king's orders.

Urged by his endless love of Tamil, the *mu<u>n</u>ivar* asks a rhetorical question, "The Lord Himself sat as a member in the Assembly of Tamil poets and studied and composed in the language. Can it be compared with other languages in the world some of which are not even subject to the discipline of a grammar?". In another place he recounts the miracles performed by the hymnists Campantar and Cuntarar by singing Tamil hymns, like bringing a dead child back alive from the mouth of a crocodile and asks if this was the work of Tamil or of other languages.

The *mu<u>n</u>ivar's* mastery of the diction and the prosody of Tamil is quite obvious. He has a colourful way of presentation which is markedly different from the listless way many poets compose; unlike them he is not too preoccupied with verbal displays and figures of speech to worry about the emotional content of the stanza. He has clear and forthright views and is most sincerely devoted to the Lord and expresses himself unambiguously and with emotional involvement which, along with the absorbing story interest of the many episodes he presents here makes the '*purāṇam*' an interesting work to read, quite apart from the devotional inspiration it certainly provides.

The Vināyaka Purāṇam

This *purāṇam* by Kacciyappa mu<u>n</u>ivar who was born about 200 years ago at Tiruttaṇi, is regarded as one of the major works in the genre, mainly on account of the calibre of the author. He composed *talapurāṇams* like *Taṇikaippurāṇam* and works of minor *pirapantam*

genres like *tūtu* and *piḷḷaittamiḻ*, too.

The work is divided into the *Līlā* and *Upācaṉa kāṇṭams* with a total of 4225 stanzas. He is recent enough to talk of Madras city in the passage on *nakaram*, lauding it as the place which can remedy the grief even of the Dēvas. In the '*Līlā kāṇṭams* the author describes the advent of the many *mūrttams* (aspects) of Vināyaka. The work contains a *Sahasranāma tuti* which can be recited by devotees for benefits here and in the hereafter. There is a *Vināyaka kavacam* also added, a kind of work where parts of the body are specified and the protection of the deity invoked for them.

The work is replete with puranic stories and explanations in detail for various phenomena we perceive in the world around us. The major requirements of a work in the *purāṇa* genre as unfolded in the Sanskrit works (and referred to earlier in this) are fulfilled in this *purāṇam*. A characteristic of Sanskrit *purāṇams* is that the deity on which a work is written is held up as the greatest of all, that is worshipped with fearful reverence by all the others. This characteristic is found in this *purāṇam*, the author making out Vināyaka as the greatest of all gods, even the Trinity invoking His help for the success of their undertaking. These ideas are illustrated with the help of many stories of typical *purāṇic* flavour.

A peculiar feature of the *purāṇam* is the detailed description of how Intiraṉ and Akalikai enjoyed intimacy; the passage explains the whole scene from the viewpoint of Vātsyayana's *Kāmacūttiram*. The author's objective must have been to fulfil some unwritten rule governing *purāṇams* that they should provide guidance to man in all his varied life activities not excluding his sex life.

The poet is obviously a great admirer of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. For, in all his works, he displays his admiration for the ethical code preached by it by adopting many of its teachings in his stanzas. There is a passage where a king teaches political science to his son; here we

find many *Tirukkuṟaḷ* concepts expanded into full *viruttam* stanzas in a beautifully lucid fashion.

Kāñci purāṇam

We now come to the world of *'talapurāṇams'*, a world very thickly populated, as, theoretically, it is possible for every town or village with a temple to have its own *'talapurāṇam'* and in practice every place which had a rich man to finance it did have a work composed on it by a poet who went from place to place writing similar works. Indeed it became a status symbol for a holy place to have a *talapurāṇam* written on it by a bespoke poet. Poets like Makā vittuvāṉ Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai who had the potential in them to compose great *kāppiyams* spent their lives composing works in this genre as this could keep them alive. Patrons of a wider culture were wanting who would pay out money and have *kāppiyams* written by good poets-a true sign of decay.

Out of this mediocre lot of works, a few like the *Kāñcip purāṇam* stand out mainly on account of the calibre of the poet and partly of the nature of the holy place. Kāñci has been enjoying a great reputation as a holy place from early times; there is a Sanskritic counting of seven holy cities of the country in which Kāñci is the only city of Tamil Nadu to figure; Sriraṅkam and Citamparam and Rameswaram have no place in that privileged list. It is reputed that there are 64 temples in the city, some of Vaiṇava interest, some of Saiva, one at least of Kavumāram and one of Sāktam. During the heyday of Buddhism, Kāñci was one of the chief cities of the faith where there was a famous university in which students from foreign countries studied. There was quite a deal of Sanskritic culture too there and at least two great Sanskrit poets Bharaṇi and Daṇṭi flourished in the city.

The *talapurāṇam* on this city was written by Civañāṉa muṉivar, a colossus of high reputation in the literary and philosophical world.

It is based on a passage in the Sanskrit *Skantam* and comprises 2742 verses. It contains, besides accounts of temples of Kāñci, a brief note on most of the sacred places in the south. This work is generally read by advanced students of Tamil as part of their curriculum. The quality of this work and the stature of the author stimulated the production of '*talapurāṇams*' all over the country; his own two disciples took the lead in this movement and composed a number of them.

The author who belonged to the 18th century has been careful to describe the society, not of his own times, but of the much earlier epoch during which the episodes described took place. It is, however, unfortunate that he advocates with zeal some malpractices of the past like child marriage. He was clearly a worshipper of the past who did not critically examine the practices and beliefs of the past and reject those that had outlived their utility.

Another defect can be noticed in this work. The poet introduces many of the *tuṟais* of *puṟam* in the '*purāṇam*' especially when describing the surroundings of Kāñci. And in his zeal to use them as metaphors, he comes out with quite a few contrived-looking pictures; clearly the warlike *tuṟais* like '*veṭci*' and '*tumpai*' are inapplicable here and the author's attempt to force them has not improved the quality of the work.

But let us come now to the many merits of this work. The poet rightly devotes a great deal of space to a description of the city which emerges from this account as one of the truly well-planned and well-built and well-maintained metropolises of the world of that epoch. Apart from the usual amenities like shops and brothels, the city boasted several cultural associations where experts foregathered to discuss subtle points of technique or to clear the doubts of novices. Kāñci must have played an important role in the growth and conservation of literature, philosophy and the arts and sciences, from the vivid descriptions we have of the city 's many advanced

institutions fostering them.

Kāñci has always been noted for the highly developed skills of its famous craftsmen in weaving silk garments. The poet refers to this industry listing the different kinds of silk fabrics woven in the city.

But this is pre-eminently a religious work and the author devotes the major part of it to a clear enunciation of religious truths and philosophical concepts; as a staunch Saiva, he naturally devotes many hundreds of verses to glorify Saivism. But he is quite fair to other sects too and actually takes time to explain their beliefs too when the occasion arises.

The author catalogues as many as 14 reasons why Lord Siva is superior to all other Gods, based on *purāṇic*, theological and philosophical grounds. He also cites twenty instances and pieces of evidence to prove that Lord Siva is the Prime Deity. Some of these are that Rāma himself worshipped Lord Siva at Rameswaram, that it was Lord Siva who furnished Tirumāl with the disc which became His distinct and most potent weapon, that Lord Siva destroyed Takkaṉ's sacrifice as he insulted Him, that Tirumāl acted as His vehicle at the time He destroyed the three cities and that it is Lord Siva who is regarded as Pacupati, the lord of all creation.

The work is replete with Saiva concepts too. The great merit of the work consists in explaining in the clearest possible terms, often with a poetic touch, the recondite concepts of this school of philosophy spelt out in aphoristic form by Meykaṇṭār.

Some other select talapurāṇams

Kacciyappa muṉivar, the chief disciple of Civañāṉa muṉivar wrote the *talapurāṇam* for Pērur, a small holy place near Coimbatore. The *muṉivar* had an extraordinary ability to compose poetry as people speak prose. Such poets, on account of the ease with which they lisp in numbers are not tempted to write deep poems of significance;

their very gift stands in their way of making a meaningful contribution that can withstand the ravages of time. Poets of Kacciyappa mu͟nivar's ability to talk in verse attain great fame during their lifetime; but after their death it suffers a rapid decline. This poet was honoured and perhaps feared as a 'kavi raksasa' in his lifetime and verses were composed crowning him as a poet the equal of the *Caṅkam* masters. Posterity is markedly less enthusiastic in its estimate of him.

The Lord of Pērur is Paṭṭinātar, the name being based on the other appellation of the place, Paṭṭīcuvaram. There are two trees associated with the temple, one a tamarind tree that is said to be birthless and the other, a palmyra tree that is regarded as deathless.

The work consists of 2220 verses and is replete with Siddhanta concepts and those adopted from the great works of the past. A feature of the work is the sustained similes and metaphors carried over several stanzas without any inappropriateness creeping in. The *mu͟nivar* can match the diction and the metre to the sense so that often the sense and the sentiment become apparent merely if the stanza is read aloud once, even to one who is not scholar enough to understand it semantically.

The author is a staunch devotee of Siva and he tries to prove His all-round supremacy and primacy in the course of the *purāṇam*. As *talapurāṇams* are expected to, this describes the features of the three-fold aspect, the *mūrtti*, the *talam* and the *tīrttam* and narrates the accounts of many devotees who worshipped here and attained bliss.

Another *talapurāṇam* from the same author is that on Tiruttaṇi; this is perhaps the most famous work of the genre next to *Kāñcip purāṇam*. Every *talapurāṇam* is supposed to have been taught to the rishis in Naimisāraṇya by Cūta, the 'paurāṇika' par excellence.

Many Tamil *purāṇams* including the Tiruttaṇikai have initial chapters on *'nāṭu'* (the country) and *'nakaram'* (the city), perhaps as a concession to Tamil tradition. Otherwise this genre is almost wholly Sanskritic in flavour. Civañāṉa muṉivar and Kacciyappa muṉivar introduce a considerable amount of Saiva Siddhanta doctrines and of old Tamil literary concepts and as a consequence they are better read than the rest of the genre that contains little to rescue it from mediocrity.

Tiruttanikaip purāṇam contains 3161 stanzas and is replete with *Caṅkam* and *Tirukkuṟaḷ* concepts and images. The poet uses *Caṅkam* imagery freely when describing the elopement of Vaḷḷi and Murukaṉ, in the manner made famous by Kacciyappa Civācāriyar in his *Kantapurāṇam.* In the passage on *nāṭu* (the country), the poet more or less recreates for us the ideal country as envisaged by Tiruvaḷḷuvar. Though a staunch Saiva who describes the *pati-pacu-pācam* concept with great gusto, the poet does not hesitate to use ideas from Jain literary works like *Cilappatikāram* and *Cintāmaṇi*, thus silently paying his mead of tribute to these creative geniuses. We should remember that in these eras there was a great deal of prejudice against non-Hindu literature and there were not many scholars who had read *Cilappatikāram* and *Cintāmaṇi* and could openly quote from them in appreciation. This was the era, we should bear in mind, which finally and almost irrevocably lost the secular works of the *Caṅkam* epoch. Anything that was not piously religious and preferably Saiva did not enjoy much readership in these decadent times.

The poet uses in one place (*Kaḷavuppaṭalam*, 227) a grammar usage spoken of by Tolkāppiyar as a metaphor to emphasise that even if Murukaṉ is highly lauded by Intiraṉ he cannot be allowed to do anything that goes against the code of conduct that prevails in the hunter society. He can play with words in a manner that takes the reader's breath away. For instance, in the *Nanti upatēcap*

paṭalam, he puns on a word to produce two meanings in the 73rd verse, three meanings in the next, four in the verse next to it, five in the succeeding one and as many as six meanings in the 77th verse. This must surely rank as the Himalayan achievement in punning. For play on words, for the rich use of other figures of speech, for sheer rhythm and cadence, there are few works to compare with this.

We may note briefly two more *talapurāṇams* before we go on to the next section. One is the work composed by Āravamutacāriyar who obtained initiation in Saivism from a great Saiva leader and despite grinding poverty mastered not only Siddhanta lore but the entire range of Tamil literature. At the request of friends, he composed a *talapurāṇam* on Tirucculiyal, a holy place made famous by the advent of Ramaṇa Makariṣi in recent times. The place has been honoured by Cuntarar who visited it in the company of his royal friend Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and sang a decade on the Lord enshrined there.

This work contains only 750 verses arranged under 16 *Carukkams*. The holy place has 8 sacred pieces of water and 8 lingas. The goddess Earth felt she had been polluted by the *asura* Iraṇyāṭcaṉ who kept her in his armpit, before he was killed by Tirumāl. She went to Kayilāyam and prayed to Lord Siva for purification and He directed her to this holy place where she worshipped the Lord and got rid of her pollution. There is quite a long list of *Kantarvas*, ascetics, kings and the god of love who worshipped the Lord here and got untold benefits.

We learn from this work how Cuntarar was born out of the reflection of Lord Siva in a big mirror in Kayilāyam; the Lord was so impressed at his own handsome reflection, he called out to the image, "Come, Cuntara (the handsome one), come to me!". From the image emerged the strikingly prepossessing form of Ālālacuntarar,

who was born later as, Cuntaramūrtti nāyaṉār. This holy place is intensely associated with this spirited saint-minstrel who, as noted before, visited it in the company of Cēramaṉ Perumāḷ and sang a decade on the Lord.

There is a *talapurāṇam* on Tiruccentūr which owes its popularity to the fact that its subject is the object of reverential worship by millions of Tamils. The greatest saints have visited the shrine and sung soul-stirring hymns on Murukaṉ enshrined here; among them were the leading lights of the Kaumāra cult, Aruṇakirinātar, Kumarakuruparar, Pakaḻik kūttar and Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ. The author of the *talapurāṇam* is one Veṉṟimālaik kavirāyar, a brahmin who, it is said, was untaught and was actually a cook in the service of the temple when disgusted with life, he tried to commit suicide and was saved by Lord Murukaṉ who instructed him to render in Tamil the *talapurāṇam* on Tiruccentūr available in Sanskrit.

The cook-turned-poet had the *"purānam "* explained to him by a Sanskrit scholar and composed a Tamil version in 99 verses divided into 18 chapters. It follows faithfully the pattern of *'talapurāṇam* (and even the *purāṇams*) set by Sanskrit works of the genre; the *purānam* is taught to the rishis of the Naimisa forest by Cūta, the *'purāṇika.'* The style is simple; the work has some weighty stanzas; the story of Vaḷḷi's birth and her growing up to a beauty among the hunting folk and her elopement with Lord Murukaṉ is told with zest, following closely on the footsteps of Kacciyappa Civācāriyar and Kacciyappa Muṉivar.

The Pirapuliṅkalīlai

Even though it is not named a *purāṇam* , the *Pirapuliṅkalīlai* of Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ is in that genre, intended to spread faith and belief in the supremacy and primary of Lord Siva. This has been composed in the traditions of the Vīra Saiva sect and it enjoyed

considerable popularity in the academic world of the days gone by when it formed part of the curriculum of higher Tamil studies. The work has considerable literary charm, unaffected by its overweening religious flavour.

The work describes Lord Siva's incarnation as 'Allamapirapu' and His many sportive deeds in the world of men. The work itself is envisaged as a cow walking on its four feet (the four feet of a Tamil *Viruttam)* and nursing the Lord's devotees with its milk of divine grace. For no one can reach God as long as he is under the influence of illusion *(māyai)*.

The importance of being born in the human condition and the efficacy of a guru's grace are strongly emphasised in this. To a question from Umā, the Lord replies stating that none of the Dēvas can inherit eternal life directly from his present state. For he has to be born as a human and seek a guru through whose teaching he can attain final emancipation. Umā then asks Him, "Is there such a guru?" and the Lord replies, "Yes, there is;he is 'Allama'. And he is my incarnation. He is the greatest of teachers. But it is not easy to find him and get accepted by him."

Umā somehow feels roused to utter a challenge to the Lord that she will send *Māyai* to the earth and show that she (*Māyai*) can find Allama with ease. The challenge is accepted and *Māyai* is sent to the earth where she is born as a princess. She grows up highly accomplished in all the arts; her chief interest in life, however, is to marry Lord Siva.

Allama comes to the palace as a musical accompanist playing on the *Taṇṇumai* (a drum-like instrument) and *Māyai* falls headlong in love with him. At a certain point he disappears leaving her lovelorn and in deep anguish. She tries every trick in her power to ensnare him but fails. This, in brief is the story of *Pirapuliṅkalīlai*.

The Story facilitates the display of the great powers of creative imagination which the Cuvāmikaḷ possesses and the work is as much a dilettante's delight as it is a god-lover's gospel.

The Jains have adapted *purāṇams* in Sanskrit and Prakrit in the Tamil language to serve the needs of their faith. They have two major *purāṇams* in Tamil, the *Mērumantaram* and the *Srīpurāṇam*. Both are based on episodes in *Makāpurāṇam* but much embellished with typical *purānic* material.For instance. *Srīpurāṇam*, the more popular of the two details the lives of the 24 Tīrttaṅkaras, the 12 Cakravartins, the 9 Vāsudēvas, 9 Balarāmas and 9 Prativāsudēvās. While narrating the lives of each *tīrttaṅkarar*, the *purānam* furnishes accounts of the royal dynasties they were connected with. Thus it has turned out to be a storehouse of episodes and incidents which authors could exploit for their independent literary or religious works.

The *Mērumantara purāṇam* deals mainly with two princes, Mē ru and Mantara. The story is a very involved one, taking the reader through several births and deaths but the moral is clear: honesty is rewarded eventually and dishonesty, punished .The two princes after going through the cycle of samsara get born as the children of the king of Uttara Matura.They get the principles of dharma explained to them by Vimala Tīrttaṅkarar whose disciples they become; they advance in spirituality so much that they get accepted as *kaṇataras*, chief disciples of the Lord. They perfect themselves through yoga and attain salvation at the end of their lives. Both the *purāṇams* teach a great of dharma according to the Jains and are therefore viewed with veneration by them.

Chapter Seven

MINOR LITERATURE

Some general features

The spirit of a society is subtly expressed in the art produced by it at every epoch. The Indian society had been domineering, prosperous, self confident in the two millennia before and after Christ. There was little threat from outside, great kings came up at periodical intervals and peace reigned bringing in its wake prosperity and a renaissance in the arts. With foreign invasions giving it deathblows from the outside and its own seeds of decay bearing fruit inside, the society began to stagnate and then deteriorate. Historians call the subsequent epochs the Muslim and the British periods, thereby setting the seal on the decay of a once vigorous society.

The extent of the decay can be roughly gauged from the kind of literature produced which, being aimed to satisfy the current tastes of the people constitutes therefore a good index of the level of culture of the people. In the pre-Christian era, the society needed and was proffered the *Caṅkam* literature; the love lyrics of this period constitute an amazing body of works (as we have noted earlier) composed to satisfy an astounding society of litterati, the like of which this country has not seen since, the like of which must be a rare phenomenon anywhere in the world. Then followed the days of the five great (non Hindu) epics, then the hymnal literature and Kampaṉ and Villi and Cēkkiḻār. Indeed Kampaṉ must be regarded as a freak, born very much at the wrong epoch; the epoch was getting too attenuated in spirit to produce a master like Kampaṉ. Kampaṉ is not the typical product of his times and hence does not represent his times. The Indian society was quickly reaching the level of

stagnation where it was destined to remain till this century.

And the society which produced and delighted in the *Kuruntokai* and the *Cilappatikāram* and the *Rāmāyaṇam* began to spew forth small works which began to be called '*pirapantams*' - works which were small not merely in size. Whereas in the previous epoch, the poets rose above the forms they exploited, the form or the genre now became the master, keeping the poetasters under its tyrannical thrall. Originality, innovativeness and a freshness of approach gave place to stylised imagery and farfetched conceits supported by verbal acrobatics. It is to be admitted that a few creative artists did flourish during this sterile period; some escaped the shackle of these minor *pirapantams* altogether, writing epics like the *Nalavenpā*; others allowed themselves to be enthralled by this minor literature producing near-great works in these steel-frames of literary forms.

As literature, these *pirapantams*, with an astonishingly small number of exceptions, do not rate high. But in a study of literary genres, they become important because of their number and variety. Hence it becomes the duty of the present writer to devote a very long passage (nearly a fifth of the book) to a detailed consideration of this crop of genres which started proliferating like plants in a tropical jungle, from the 12th century.

Their history should start, not at the 12th century but much earlier, however. No literary genre starts at the drop of a hat; genres do not blossom like Siberian meadows magically on the onset of Spring; they have a long history behind them. Some of the genres have been recognised in *Tolkāppiyam* itself and one, the *āṟṟuppaṭai* had as many as five examples in *Caṅkam* literature. In some lyrics of *Caṅkam* we have heroes and heroines sending out birds as messengers; this must have spawned the major and very prolific genre of *tūtu* much later. There are some beautiful stanzas in the post-*Caṅkam* work, *Muttoḷḷāyiram* describing kings coming in procession

in the streets of their capital city sending girls in love with them into a frenzy. As Tamil aṇṇal points out, some genres have had an early beginning during the Bhakti epoch while some, like the *paḷḷu* and *kummi* owe their origin to folksongs.

Kōvai was envisaged in the grammars on *Akapporuḷ* and *Kalampakam*, too, involving the use of different metres. *Piḷḷaittamiḻ* was given a beautiful start by the Vaiṇava saint Periyāḻvār. *Antāti* was similarly flagged off by Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār. The basic idea behind *maṭal* is there in *Caṅkam* lyrics and Tirumaṅkai Ālvār sang two *maṭals* out of the six *pirapantams* he composed. The tradition of *Eḻukūṟṟirukkai*, similarly, started with this Ālvār and with Ñāṉacampantar. Many of the *pirapantam* forms arose from the *puṟam* classification centering on *vañci* and *veṭci* and *vākai* among the *tuṟais* discussed in *Tolkāppiyam*.

The intelligent reader going through the mass of these minor works recognises a distinction that divides them into two classes. Quite a few of these are made distinct and get classified as a genre only on account of physical factors which have nothing to do with the subject matter. Examples of this type are the '*antāti*', 'the *Catakam*', '*Iraṭṭaimaṇimālai*', '*Mummaṇimālai*' and '*Nāṉmaṇimālai*'. They can be used as the vehicle for amorous subjects or religious themes or aphorisms and they have indeed been used for all these purposes. The other is the classification based on the subject matter and its arrangement like '*Tūtu*', '*Piḷḷaittamiḻ*, *Kuṟam*' and '*Kōvai*'. While the second classification appears to be on a deeper, more weighty criterion, we should also remember that the control of the poet over the subject matter is much greater in the first case than in the second. An *antāti* can be composed on any subject and there are no subsidiary rules hamstringing the poet who is free to plan his work in any way he likes. The *Piḷḷaittamiḻ* genre lays down so many conditions that the poet comes to have a very limited choice of alternatives; it is not surprising that the most stylised, type-set

works in minor literature are those composed in this genre. Unfortunately this genre has somehow attained tremendous popularity among the poetasters who wrote very mediocre works with nothing to recommend them on every deity in every temple in the country.

The Kalampakam

One of the earliest varieties of minor literature to be exploited for poetic composition was the '*Kalampakam*'. The genre permits a variety of metres to be employed, as also a diversity of love moods. In regard to the latter, it is very similar to the *kōvai* but the *kōvai* is much more formalised with a story outline at the base of it. At its incipience, it was used to compose secular poems on kings and chieftains but in the latter centuries we have only religious poems as examples of this genre. Some of the most famous religious poets like Kumarakuruparar and Piḷḷaipperumāḷ Aiyaṅkār wrote some of their best work in this genre.

The first of the *Kalampakam* works - which also happens to be one of the best in the whole genre - is the *Nantikkalampakam* sung on Nantivarmaṉ III the Pallava king who ruled between 825 and 850 A.D . There is a sombre story told apocryphally about the origin of the work. A cousin of the king who was envious of his eminence composed this work with passages in it which would spell death to the hero if he heard them. The king happened to hear one or two stanzas of the poem and being a great connoisseur of letters he longed to hear the entire work. The zealous ministers and even the poet (now renounced worldly life and repentant) remonstrated with the king but the latter was such an uncompromising lover of Tamil, he said he was prepared to die after hearing the wonderful poem recited.

Then elaborate arrangements were made and the king moved from *pantal* to *pantal* at the end of each stanza, the previous structure catching fire on account of the necromantic effects put into

each. For the final stanza, the king lay down on a funeral heap of faggots and as the final words died down, flames leapt up and consumed the dilettante-king. The story gained wide currency and is now accepted as gospel. It was possibly thought up to emphasise two things, the exceptional critical faculties of the king and the high quality of the work.

But let us not be deterred by such doleful stories from enjoying what is beyond doubt one of the great works in Tamil. Genre-wise it is minor literature but its qualities as a work of art are not minor in dimensions. The first notable feature of the work is its freshness of approach which is notably lacking in most of minor literature. There are few far-fetched conceits and verbal tricks and no contrived striving after effect. There is genuine poetical talent at work and it is a joy to read verse after verse cast in the various moods of love, with our sense of wonder roused at how innovatively fresh an author could be on these overwritten themes.

A girl, in love with the king Nanti is in sore traits on account of her love sickness which grew more tormenting as she could not set eyes on him day after frustrating day. One day she hears that he is coming in procession in the street and is pathetically keen to drink in his personality from a point of vantage. But her foster mother had heard of her pathetic love and deciding not to allow her to make a spectacle of herself she confines her to the house. So she thinks up a stratagem, goes up to the foster-mother and tells her she would like to spend sometime pleasantly using the swing in the front porch. The poem is the reply of the shrewd old woman who turns down the girl's proposal and forbids her from using the swing in the porch. And she does not make a secret of her reasons for this. For, she notes grimly that the girl is not herself on account of the love she bears to the king and she will certainly break down on seeing him driving in state in front of her. The Tamil used is sharp

and forbidding echoing the stern determination of the foster-mother.

In another passage, finding that her child's love for the king waxing instead of dying out through the stern measures she has taken, she addresses the king thus:

Nanti, king with leg ornaments
Of the purest gold, who wield a javelin
That works havoc in the field of battle!
This girl, my child may leave off playing
With berries, may even forget the swing,
But she keeps on singing the divers glories
Of the garland wreathed from 'toṇṭai" flowers
That adorns your chest! What has come o'er her? (1)

In another stanza, a conventional idea is worked up in a pleasing manner. The friend of the girl asks the king "You do not direct at her your most compassionate glances. That is bad enough. Not content with that neglect, why do you carry off her bangles that adorned her wrists? Is this justice? And you are praised as the just ruler who rules over the whole world in the fairest manner!". This idea is recast from the *Muttoḷḷāyiram* but the poem has individual features of its own, meriting a perusal.

There is a fine stanza which could be mistaken for a *Caṅkam* lyric (expect for the metre, of course); so redolent is it of *Caṅkam* conventions and the subtle touch so characteristic of *Caṅkam* lyrics. The verse is in the version of the (girl) friend of the heroine, that indefatiguable planner blessed with a high intelligence, loyalty and courage. She says this to the girl at night, standing under the compulsory tree await for the boy's arrival. As a matter of fact, the boy has arrived and is hiding. And the plan of the friend is that he should overhear her words and take energetic steps to arrange for a public wedding instead of prolonging the courtship. Here is the poem:

Mature is the millet,
The ears are ready
For harvesting.
And we shan't be coming
To guard the millet.
How then can you
And he of the hills
Ruled over by Nanti
Of lasting fame,
How can you two
Meet in the future?
He surely shall
Waste away, dear,
And there seems to be
No way to help it. (2)

There is a fine stanza from the boy, said in worshipful admiration of the girl which needs to be enjoyed here:

Can it be that the mother of this,
The girl of beauty unparalleled
In all the city of Mylapore,
Ruled over by Nanti of deathless fame -
Can it happen that she nurses a grudge
Against all the youthful world of men?
For she has, with unguent, anointed
Her long and handsome eyes with veins
Thin and crimson and dressed her up
And let her freely walk in the streets,
Let her be seen by everyone
In the streets of Nanti's capital town ! (3)

The work has been rightfully enjoying a lasting popularity with the pandit and the layman alike in the thousand years after its composition. Its happy diction, apposite metres and pleasant con-

ceits, even if not very original, make its study an enjoyable experience..

Some religious Kalampakams

We shall now shift to a religious '*Kalampakam*' by a remarkable poet, 'Piḷḷaipperumāḷ Aiyaṅkār who flourished in the 12th century and earned the title of '*tivviyakavi*'. He seems to have attained a total mastery over the language and the nuances of grammar and prosody. As a consequence, his works, eight in number (named *Aṣṭapirapantam*), though pleasant to read and constitute good poetry are pointed out for the pattern of pedantry and studied eagerly in schools for attaining profundity in scholarship. The total number of verses in this anthology is 751. A whole work - the *Tiruvaraṅkattu antāti* is riddled with *yamakam*, a verbal trick yielding different meanings with different ways of dissolving word-combinations and involving the repetition of groups of letters. We shall, happily, have to deal only with the *Tiruvaraṅkak Kalampakam* which is largely free from such verbal jugglery and which adds up to a fine poetical composition.

In the first few lines of the work themselves we see the poetic flow of reverent ideas like "You are the ultimate God for all those who claim that they are gods" and "You took the form of an enormous pig to lift the earth from morass; and the earth looked like a spot of dust on your protruding teeth."

The Lord's physical valour is praised in a passage of vigorous stanzas set in the most appropriate metre where the words fairly burst out with the very vigour of the deeds they describe and consequently are very difficult to translate. The major heroic feats performed by Tirumāl in all His ten *avatārs* are referred to, describing how the evil forces were ruthlessly put down by the power of His arms. Then follow a number of poems involving the fitting out of various agencies as messengers by a love-lorn lady to the Lord of

Tiruvaraṅkam. In one of them, too long to be presented in translation, the lady regrets having sent her mind as the messenger while her maids were all available near her and the parrots, the gifted talkers among the feathered fraternity being all ready to fly away on her mission. She thought initially that a girl's best and most trusted friend can only be her heart and hence fitted out her heart to carry the tidings of how she was wasting away from unrequited love for the Lord. Now she concludes that instead of returning to her after delivering her message, her heart had been so attracted by the form of the Lord, it must have decided to stay with him!

She then describes another attempt at sending a messenger to Him. She selects a bee this time and fits it out. But time flows by and there is no sign of the bee returning. She begins to nurse misgivings about her choice though she has not lost all hope of her messenger performing its allotted task. Here is the stanza:

Will it forget? Will it imbibe
More honey in the blooming woods
Than is good for it and fail to fly
Onward where it's detailed to go?
Will it reach the Lord's sanctorum,
Will it find the proper words
To ask for boons that are worth asking?
Or, overawed, will it, o heart,
Will the bee I have fitted out
As my own messenger to the one I love
Fail to do what I desire done? (4)

There are other stanzas where the natal mother of the girl remonstrates with the Lord for His callous neglect of her while His reputation established in the *purāṇams* and psalms indicates how compassionate and considerate He always has been in respect of His

devotees in anguish. The foster-mother, the more loving and therefore the more forgiving of the two (as determined by tradition) laments about her daughter's physical and mental distress on account of her unrequited love for her lord and demands to know if this is justice in His eyes. This stanza done in an extra long metre is full of pleasing verbal effects.

As is required by the rules of grammar, the different moods of love and episodes in the life of lovers are presented, pell-mell, without much order or cogency as it happens in all *kalampakam* works. Messenger-stanzas appear at intervals as also stanzas describing the girl's agony. The friend's affectionate words are presented but with less vivacity than in the *Caṅkam* works. The reason may be that much of her vivacity was displayed at the cost of the hero in *Caṅkam* love lyrics and a devotee of the type of Aiyaṅkār could not possibly bring himself to delineate such scenes where the Lord is at the receiving end of some rough treatment.

There is a fine stanza presented in the girl's version which is worth reproduction here. It occurs towards the very end of the work and the girl is at the end of her patience now. She is determined in her desperate state to demand and get back things lost by her to him, her ring and bangles. If he demurs, she would claim His disc and conch. The Lord might come back with the plea that these had been mortgaged to his devotees. (In Vaiṇava tradition, these two are the most characteristic symbols of the Lord and very devout Vaisṇavas brand themselves with them as a sign of affiliation). She would then step beyond the war of words and seize forcefully of the wreath of *tuḷaci* leaves He wears. This is the stanza:

If I ever get to reach
The lovely courtyard of Araṅkam
I shall ask for and obtain
My ring and bangles lost to him.

If he does not oblige me,
I shall tell him, "You have got
Your mace, your sword, your bow and arrows.
You can give me your conch and disc!"
He may demur, he may say,
"These are things that have been mortgaged
To my devotees!" I shall react
To this latest negation
By seizing His wreath of tuḷaci leaves! (5)

Let us now consider another author, a celebrated poet of the Saiva school, Kumarakuruparar who has composed poems in many of the genres of minor literature. Under the genre *Kalampakam*, he is reputed to have composed three works, on Maturai, Kāci and Kayilai, of which the last-mentioned is not available. We shall deal here briefly with the other two.

Kumarakuruparar was born dumb and his parents took him when he was five years of age to Tiruccentūr where they laid the boy before the icon and remained in the temple, observing a ritual. The boy got the power of speech with the grace of Murukaṉ and he became a scholar and a poet in the shortest possible time. He composed a psalm on Murukaṉ called *Kantar Kaliveṇpā* which is chanted every day by devotees of Murukaṉ as a *mantiram* for benefits here and hereafter. He grew up to be a celebrated poet who confined his interest only to the field of religion and later renounced material life. He toured about the country visiting only the places of religious interest like Citamparam and Kāci. At Kāci he won the approbation of the emperor of Delhi and mastered Hindustani. He was given a piece of land at Kāci by the Muslim emperor in which to built a *maṭam*. There is an unconfirmed story that he delivered a series of lectures on *Kamparāmāyaṇam* which influenced Tulssidas considerably. We do not see actually much influence of Kampaṉ's

work in Tulasi's. Kumarakuruparar composed two works in the *Piḷḷaittamiḻ* genre which are the most famous among his compositions. He flourished in the 17th century.

In the *Maturaikkalampakam*, the poet deftly brings in many of the exploits of Siva associated with the city of Maturai and dealt with at length in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. Thus he refers to one of the exploits where the Lord makes an example of a rebellious disciple of a good Guru, Cittaṉ by name by cutting his limbs into bits in a wrestling arena. This is dexterously spun into an *ammāṉai* where two girls or sets of girls sing, one raising a point and the other, answering it. Thus one girl refers to the Lord's exploit of cutting the limbs of Cittaṉ and the other says in a critical vein, "Yes, he did do that, But then, why did He divide His own limb in to two?" The first girl replies with spirit, "He did, but then the act did not injure Him at all; there was no wound caused to him on account of that division!:".

There are the usual stanzas devoted to a description of the love-lorn state of a girl who is infatuated with the Lord. In some of the stanzas, birds are sent as messengers to the Lord to convey to him the pathetic position in which she has been placed as a result of His neglect. In one of them the incident of the Lord transporting mud as a coolie for wages, the wages being a sweet dish made of flour is referred to. These verses are otherwise of a routine flavour with nothing to distinguish them.

Kācikkalampakam also runs on similar lines except that the poet makes less of the exploits of the Lord at Maturai. Here some of the verses like that describing His valour and His martial exploits are full off verbal effects in which Kumarakuruparar excels. In these works he reveals himself as a master of the Tamil language with all its nuances and as an accomplished craftsman who can manipulate the most difficult metres. But he is not a very imaginative poet and there is very little that is poetically exalted or strikingly original in

his works. It is deep piety and not any great creative ability that is evident in his compositions.

Poets professing other faiths too saw how this genre was attractive to the common run of readers and how it had been harnessed by Hindu poets to propagate their faith. Among the more famous works in this genre by a poct other than Hindu is *Nākūrk Kalampakam* of Ghulam Kadir Pāvalar.

Kalampakam, as a genre, is less hamstringing than most and is thus more suited to bring out the best in a poet. There are quite a few of the *Akam* modes in it, as we have seen. The love-lorn lady lamenting, the friend counselling the hero to make up his mind and seek the hand of the girl from her father, the foster-mother bewailing the sad state of physical and emotional exhaustion into which her girl had fallen, the girl herself fitting out every bird and bee in sight as a messenger to her lover-all these figure in these *Kalampakam* poems in quite a disarray. In addition, there are a few poems cast in the *puṟam* modes like the martial prowess of the hero (*Puyavakkuppu)* and the abject submissiveness of the vassals to the hero. This looseness of structure and motif may be a point against this genre; but the present writer feels that the poet has a greater degree of freedom in this genre than in many others where he is shackled and tied up, where his wings are curbed by too great a rigour of organisation. This excessive organisation of the material demanded by many genres is the very bane of minor literature; and while this explains the popularity of minor literature with poets of low calibre who did not have to display originality except in the details, it certainly accounts for the steady deterioration in the literary values of the work produced in the later centuries.

Piḷḷait Tamiḻ

As stated earlier, it was Periyāḻvār's hymns where he put himself in the mental state of Yacōtai and sang songs of tender affection

for the child Krishna which constituted the inspiration for all the works in this genre. While the Āḻvār sang as his spirit directed him without being hidebound by rules and restrictions, many conventions developed in course of time with the natural result of delimiting the poet's options.

The main feature of this genre is that the god or person panegyrised is treated as a child and its gambols and pre occupations are organised into ten stages of development. Out of the ten, seven are common to both the sexes; the three other stages are prescribed in accord with the characteristics peculiar to the sexes. Each of these stages called *paruvams* is described in ten verses; there are works of this genre with only five verses under each *paruvam.* Very long metres are favoured for this genre. There are rules governing various aspects of the genre; even the order in which the gods should be worshipped at the beginning of the work is regulated. We are however not going into these wearisome regulations which have little real significance.

Let us first consider *Muttukkumāracāmip Piḷḷaittamiḻ* composed by Kumarakuruparar; it can well claim to be the best work in the genre. The deity (Murukaṉ) is enshrined in a sub-shrine in the Siva temple at Puḷḷirukkuvēḷūr, now called Vaittīcuvaraṉ Kōyil near Mayilāṭuturai in Thanjavur district. Murukaṉ is one of the two deities in the Hindu pantheon (the other being Kaṇṇaṉ) who are popularly worshipped as a child god. Hence there is much appropriateness in composing a *Piḷḷaittamiḻ* poem on Him. Most unfortunately there are poems in this genre where the hero panegyrised is an old celebate, an anchorite with whom to associate the playful pranks of childhood is not only amusing but image-destroying.

After properly saluting all the important gods, the poet celebrates the childish pranks of Murukaṉ involving the entire universe in the *Ceṅkīraipparuvam* supposed to represent the 5th month of the

child. The pranks of the most celebrated warrior of the heavens are naturally cataclysmic for the universe initially but no actual harm ensues to life in the planets on account of His quality of compassion. Some of the pranks referred to are catching hold of the eight elephants which guard the eight directions and inciting each to fight with the others and allowing the water of the western and the eastern seas to mix. There are many places in which the exploits of a mature Murukan̲ like killing the demons and marrying Vaḷḷi are referred to; this is customary in this genre and the cheerful disregard of chronology is forgiven. The sixth verse in this *paruvam* gives a very vivid picture of the kind of posturing implied in the term *Ceṅkīrai;* the extraordinary length of the metre allows of a detailed portrayal of scenes like this; but as the metre is very big, usually the poet brings in several concepts and episodes from the *Kantapurāṇam* to fill it to completion.

One of the stanzas in the *Cappāṇipparuvam* (describing the clapping of hands by the child) envisages Murukan̲'s hands going over the various parts of Vaḷḷi's body and both deriving and giving pleasure; here he says that the breasts were so big and heavy and the hip so fragile the former looked like fulfilling the tribal urge of Vaḷḷi's people to kill by breaking the weak and thin hip. Though the references to the sizes off the breasts and the hip are conventional, there is a freshness in having brought in Vaḷḷi's hunting pedigree into the picture.

It is traditionally considered difficult to compose the *ampulipparuvam* in this genre, possibly because the openings available for a poet in this are limited. Most poets therefore are content to call the moon to play with the child, in a routine manner. Our poet has used considerable ingenuity in composing this part of the work. In one of the stanzas, a comparison is sought to be made and maintained between Murukan̲ and the moon; and the moon is invited to come and play with Him on account of these similarities. The moon

rose from the sea at the time of its creation; so did Murukan̲ from the sea of bliss that is Lord Siva. Murukan̲ folds his hands like a lotus so that the lips of Vaḷḷi that are like the night lily open; the moon has the same effect on the lotus and the night lily. Though there is considerable amount of contrived effect in this there is certainly much ingenuity in structuring the similarities through punning.

The moon is flattered in more verses where a lot of punning is done; the basis of much of the punning is that the words for 'night' and for 'supplication' are the same *(iravu)*; and he is invited to come down from the heavens and play with the child. In another mood, Murukan̲ 's superiority to the moon is more than hinted at and the poet says "Such a great one is condescending to play with you. Dēvas are longing to see Him but disdaining them all, He is calling you to come down. so do not prevaricate, O moon, come down and play with this child!"

Now, the poet comes out definitely into the open and describes in a beautiful verse, the best in the work, how the moon can get all the most glittering boons from Him if he pleases Him. The verse starts with the statement, "In the thousands of worlds in the universe, we hear that there is one God whom everyone talks about but no one sees. But here is that one God whom one can see and hear and even play with; He is so easily available and kind and compassionate!" Then it proceeds to the heart of the matter to say, "Nothing is too big a boon for Him to grant, nothing is beyond Him. He can grant you the worlds of Brahma and of Tirumāl too, if you desire it. And, biggest boon of all, He can grant you final emancipation and immortality. Is there anyone, O moon, to equal Him? So please come down without further ado and play with Kantan̲ of Kantapuri here!"

The poet turns on greater pressure with each succeeding verse.

First he said the moon and Murukan were comparable. Then he clearly affirmed His superiority and tried to entice the moon with promises of the most glittering boons that one could aspire for-boons which only He could proffer. Now he turns the screw on further and openly threatens the moon with severe reprisals if he refuses His orders; to back up his warning, He cites the cases of Cūrapatuman and the creator Brahma who were all severely punished by Him for their intransigence. The *paruvam* on the moon is, on the whole, well-conceived and innovatively composed. If this is the touch stone for the calibre of a poet as tradition affirms, then Kumarakuruparar must rank as one of the better poets of the second string.

As a contrast to the threats and the violence hinted at in this, the next *paruvam* involving the child destroying the mud houses constructed by young girls emphasises appropriately the softer side of the Lord. The work comes to a conclusion with two more *paruvams* devoted to descriptions of the Lord playing on a small drum and with a small toy vehicle. The poet has a happy knack of using harsh-sounding words to describe the many heroic acts of Murukan and pleasant euphonious diction to portray His love for Vaḷḷi and the love of His parents for Him and His ethereal beauty.

Piḷḷaittamiḻ on a goddess

We can now take up another work of the same genre by the same poet, but with a difference - this is on Goddess Mīnāṭci enshrined at Maturai and therefore admits some changes to suit the sex of the central personage. Here the things that interest girls like playing with berries and swinging in the swing and going as a bevy to the river for bathing are allotted *paruvams* in place of destroying mud houses and playing on 'drums' and with 'toycarts' which we find described in the other group.

In the *paruvam* devoted to prayers, there are repeated refer-

ences to the valiant acts of the Goddess as Mīṉāṭci, the Pāṇṭiya princess which put to shame even the valour of Lord Siva. In the next section the bathing and the dressing of the child are very vividly described. There is a verse in it where the poet very deftly teaches the two different roles played by Mīṉāṭci the Goddess who protects and Lord Siva who destroys by presenting Her as constructing mud houses which He, as a boy destroys.

In the next section the play methods of children in the plains are most enjoyably described. These are girl children and naturally in those days they played at house-keeping. This involves the elaborate ritual of cooking and here the innovative talent of the girls comes out best. For they feed the 'fire' with coral stalks, the fire itself being the rubies picked up. Big conchs make do as vessels and honey serves as the water and pearls constitute the grains of rice. Mīṉāṭci is praised as the ruler of such a land of plenty.

There is a poem in the fourth section which presents a memorable picture. It describes the crowning incident in the life of the Maturai princess. She gets ready for a journey of conquest and goes round the world defeating every ruler in sight. Then she climbs to the heavens to fight the Dēvas and eventually reaches Kaiyilai. It had been foretold when she was born with three breasts that one of them will disappear the moment she meets her future husband. She had been meeting a number of very eligible bachelors pitted against her in the battlefield but she felt no surge of any emotion except contempt as she put them to rout. But now, when she confronts Lord Siva she feels a strange bashfulness and she bends down her head to notice that one of her breasts has disappeared. With tiny drops of perspiration on her handsome forehead and the eyes pouring forth the deepest love she stood with her two breasts heaving, a living painting, lovely to behold. The diction and the movement of the metre have combined to make this one of the loveliest pen-portraits in minor literature.

There is a verse in the next *paruvam* where there is a play on the word *muttam*; it means a kiss, it also means a pearl. So the poet describes all the sources of pearls (Indian tradition holds that clouds, the lotus, the bamboo and the sugarcane can all yield pearls) and concludes that the kiss from the child Mīṉāṭci is superior to all these. Incidentally he despises these sources of pearls which try to compete with her different organs in beauty without success.

In the *paruvam* devoted to a description of playing with berries (a section special for girl children) there is a hyperbolic portrayal of the colourful personality of Mīṉāṭci. She takes up the berry (here made of pearls) in her hand; it appears red when seen against the red background of her palm. But when she looks at it with her jet-black eyes, the same plaything looks black in colour. Again the same object looks a dazzling white when she smiles playfully while at the game.

Another instance of the tendency to hyperbole is the section on bathing. She goes to the Vaikai river to bathe in the company of Vāṇi, Brahma's spouse and the Goddess of learning. Vāṇi points to a spot on the bank and says, "Here is where your husband carried loads of earth for wages in kind-of a sweet preparation called *piṭṭu!*" Mīṉāṭci stood transfixed, a picture of sorrow, tears streaming from her eyes. Vāṇi quickly points out that if she sheds such copious tears, the Vaikai will again be in floods and Lord Siva may have to come again to carry loads of earth as before.

The poet's handling of the *ampulip paruvam* is not particularly distinguished. He develops the idea that the moon had done several things to offend the Goddess but still she calls him, forgetting all that he did, to play with her. The offensive acts of the moon are its stealing the splendour of her face when it came up as a full moon in the skies and its residing in obvious friendship with her rival, the Gangai in the matted locks of the Lord.

In the section on the swing, there is a nice passage where Tirumakaḷ, the consort of Lord Tirumāl observes the clearly marked scar of the crescent moon on Mīṉāṭci's feet and points it out to Vāṇi and Mīṉāṭci bent down her head in bashfulness. The scar was obviously caused by Lord Siva bowing down deeply to His consort with his head pressing her feet in an attempt to pacify Her during the lovers, tiffs they have had. And the crescent moon on His head must have made the impression on Her feet from these repeated bouts of pressure. It is customary to envisage lovers' tiffs among the gods as they happen among humans but the picture here is fresh and pleasing as the dent found in Mīṉāṭci's feet has the tell-tale shape of a crescent.

There is a stanza in the work that has a miracle attached to it. Tradition has it that when the ninth stanza in *Varukaipparuvam* was being recited during the launching of the work, the Goddess Herself came in the form of a very young girl and listened to the recital and at the end, taking a necklace from out of the neck of the king who was presiding she presented it to the poet as a sign of Her approbation. The stanza does not have any distinguished concept but presents a series of metaphors describing Her which are well conceived. She is called the final fruit of all poetic exercise, the essential taste of Tamil, the light that is lighted in the hearts of admiring devotees who have dug out of them the plant of ego, root and branch, the female elephant that frisks about on the slopes of the Himalayan mountains and the living painting that the Lord executes in His heart and watches with fervour all the time.

The work is easily the best among those on a girl child and can rank as one of the best in the entire genre. The genre is so delimiting and so conventionalised that it is vain to expect striking ideas of an innovative type in it. This poet has however made the best of the opportunities offered by this delimiting genre and with the aid of his overwhelming scholarship and uncanny ability to control involved

metres has come up with two works of respectable quality.

The next work of this genre we can consider with profit is the *Tiruccentūr piḷḷaittamiḻ* composed by Pakaḻikkūttar. There is a story told about the poet who was a Vaiṇava by birth. He was afflicted with a terrible stomach ailment for which he was advised to compose a poem on Lord Murukaṉ at Tiruccentūr. He came to the holy place and composed this work which was duly launched before a learned assembly there. Though the quality of the work was undoubtedly high, there was little of approbation from the poets and scholars assembled there.

The poet was not particularly discouraged; he was most grateful to the Lord as He had cured him of his painful ailment and went home, contented. The Lord, however, decided to teach the critics a lesson and visited the poet at night and decorated him with the expensive pendant on His chest. The next day the temple authorities were shocked at the jewel being missing and finally located it on the poet's person. The scholars all realised their mistake as they could see that it was the Lord's miracle performed to underscore and publicise the poet's greatness. He was brought in state to the temple and honours were showered on him. The work is recited everyday as part of the worship at the temple.

There is a beautiful portrait in the work, of the quest of a crab for warmth as it was suffering from the cold wind from the billowy sea, ending with its finding the warm sands where there was a soft bed of pollen from fragrant flowers. There are prayers to Him to clap His tender hands in such way so that the ear ornaments that drive away darkness do not dangle, the comely forehead on the moonlike face does not get dotted with drops of sweet and the hands themselves do not turn red with the impact. There may not be much here that is striking by way of poetic imagination but the poet's total dedication to the Lord and his command over the language are not

to be questioned. Another feature of the work is the happy verbal effect the poet is able to secure without using recondite diction.

In the section on kisses, the poet brings in the same basic tradition of pearls being produced in clouds, in the sugarcane, in the bamboo and so on (to which we have referred earlier) and makes use of the possibility of punning on the word *muttam;* but he gives a twist to the idea which makes it interesting; for he says all the pearls produced by the various agencies have a price while only His kiss is invaluable.

In the section on the moon, very early on, in the first verse itself the poet through the foster-mother tells the moon that the Lord is superior to it in all ways; the moon is terrified of the snake (Rāku and Kētu) which eats it up during the eclipse while the Lord sits on the back of a peacock which makes quick work of snakes. So the moon is asked to come down to play with the child. In the other verses, purāṇic episodes are referred to where the moon did not come off very well like the sacrifice performed by Takkaṉ where the moon got crushed underfoot and the foster-mother, having destroyed any notions of superiority the moon might have been nursing invites it to come down and play with the child.

In the section on playing with the toy chariot, the poet shows his great devotion to Lord Kaṇṇaṉ (who is Murukaṉ's uncle in Hindu mythology) by portraying His childhood pranks. He deftly uses the word *'uruṭṭi'* meaning rotating a wheel, in the other sense of making a ball of and describes how Kaṇṇaṉ made predatory visits to the houses of his neighbours and made balls of the butter kept there and swallowed them; he kicked the magic cart which was merely the form taken by an evil-hearted *acuraṉ*, by rotating the wheels so fast with his feet that it got dismembered and the *acuraṉ* died. The poet goes on using the same word to denote Lord Murukaṉ's ability to drive away the accumulated effects of the actions of the previous

lives of devotees and to send rotating His wheel of authority over all the worlds; such a one is requested to push around the play chariot. Despite its lack of striking new thought, the work is worth reading for its pleasing portraits. The work has always enjoyed a high reputation among lovers of Tamil and among devotees of Lord Murukan̲.

Some notable devotees of the Lord like Mātava Civañān̲a Mun̲ivar have composed poems in this genre. Indeed it became the rage for people living in an area to get a noted poet to sing a *piḷḷaittamiḻ* on the Lord enshrined in that area; it almost became a status symbol. Muslim poets like Cavvātup pulavar, Ghulam Kadir Nāvalar and Syed Mira Leppai have composed works in this genre. It is estimated that there are as many as 120 works composed in this genre and more are being written, on contemporary scholars and even political leaders. Such an over-production of works in a genre much circumscribed by its very structure, as noticed earlier led to a steady decline in quality so that the publication of a work in this genre today turns out to be a non-event.

Paraṇi

Works of this genre celebrate a great victory in the field of battle. The origin of this genre is easy to find. In the *Pur̲anān̲ūr̲u* we have a number of poems where the king celebrates his victory in war, in the company of his loyal warriors. Poets usually made a reference to the martial feats of their patrons in their panegyrical compositions. Tamil Nadu was under the rule of three kings, the Cēra, the Cōḻa and the Pāṇṭiya and as there was a traditional rivalry among them, wars were events of frequent occurrence. A heroes' code was very much in vogue and young men of those times appeared to consider martial prowess as the only thing worth gaining. In a famous poem (*Pur̲anān̲ūr̲u*) a poetess lists the duties of people; the mother's duty is to give birth to a child and bring it up; the father's to educate him and the king's to discipline him to observe

the moral code. But the duty of a young man is to kill elephants with a javelin in the field of battle. We have seen a poem earlier, where a *Cankam* mother admonishes a girl to go and seek her son in some battlefield.

Apart from the *Puranāṉūṟu* the other work on *puṟam* themes in the *Cankam* anthologies, the *Patiṟṟuppattu* contains descriptions of war and the celebration of triumph. We have similar descriptions in the Ten Long Poems too. In the *Muttoḷḷāyiram*, the delicious little fragment composed in the epoch immediately following the *Cankam*, we have several portraits of a king triumphing in the field of battle and destroying the fertile lands of the vanquished king. When a poet wants to panegyrise a king inclined to fight battles, it is much easier for him to sing of his bravery and ruthlessness rather of his peaceful activities which may not lend themselves to sharp definition and glamorous description. And it was not only the kings, the ordinary young men of those days loved the excitement of war and the glory of success or death in the battlefield.

As seeking glory in war was a matter of primary concern in the society of those days, it is not surprising that this class of poems began to develop into a regular genre with a number of regulatory guidelines. The heyday of this genre was the period between the 10th and the 12th century when the Cōḷās were supreme. The two greatest *paraṇi* works in Tamil, the *Kalinkattupparaṇi* and the *Takkayākapparaṇi* belong to the 12th century. The earlier *paraṇi* works have all been lost; they are known to us today only through the references of other writers. After the 12th century when religion became the major preoccupation of the people and the literature produced was definitely religious in content, it is not surprising that *paraṇi* too came under the influence of religion and philosophy. It was thus that works of philosophy came to be written in the *paraṇi* genre like the *Aññavataipparaṇi* and the *Mōkavataipparaṇi*. These works celebrate the victory of the forces of good over forces of evil

by personifying them. Thus in the latter work, Vivēkan̲ destroys Mōkan̲. The works in this genre are not many, and only very occasionally new works in *paraṇi* genre are composed today.

The best known of the works in this genre is the *Kaliṅkattupparaṇi* composed by Cayaṅkoṇṭār on the invasion of Kaliṅka country by Kulōttuṅkan̲-I and his eventual victory over its king. The war happened in the year 1112 A.D. and hence the date of this work can be more or less precisely determined unlike those of many Tamil works. The work consists of nearly 600 verses in a variety of metres.

The prayers with which the work begins indicate that the poet was catholic in his faith; in the stanza on Tirumāl, he compares his patron Kulōttuṅkan̲ with the God. In fact in every one of the poems in this section, he brings in his patron in some way or the other for laudatory mention. Then after quite a number of verses describing the burning ghat and the activities of the goblins which are perhaps intended to create the right atmosphere for this sombre work, we get a clear hint of war from the mouths of some goblins, that is, that a war is likely to take place in north Kalinga. On hearing this all the goblins dance in joy before Kāḷi their goddess as a war means a plethora of corpses which constitute their food.

We have, then, a long section describing the birth of the king where hyperbole is the prevailing note. Indeed the birth of this king is called an incarnation and, as it happens in the case of all people who annex fame and renown in later years, here too the poet makes us believe that the whole of nature rejoiced at the birth of so great a personality. His education and his martial training and his early martial triumphs are covered in this part, briefly. In one of the later poems we have a multichrome portrait of what happens in all the wars where Kulōttuṅkan̲ was involved:

The eyes of the battling kings
Did not turn red in the field;
It was their feet that turned
Red on account of running.
Kulōttuṅkaṉ's javelin
Did turn red with blood.
And his fame, at the end of the fight
Turned a whiter white in hue. (6)

Kulōttuṅkaṉ was not a natural heir to the Cōḻa throne. But when the king of the Cōḻa male line died within a few months of ascending the throne and the land was left kingless, Kulōttuṅkaṉ who has related to the Cāḷukiyas and to the Cōḻas (this through a daughter, not a son of the Cōḻa line) saw his chance and travelled to the Cōḻa capital where he was crowned king.

Kulōttuṅkaṉ (which name he assumed on coronation) proved an able king. In the exaggerated claims made by the poet we can read a certain element of truth which history confirms. The land prospered and the moral code began to reassert itself. After restoring peace and inducing prosperity in the land, the king began to make war on kings around to acquire fame as a great warrior and as an emperor ruling over vast lands. His prowess in the battlefield was soon evident and king after hapless king bowed before his superior might and generalship.

The only exception was Aṉantavaṉmaṉ king of north Kaliṅga country who had defaulted paying tribute to the Cōḻa monarch for two years in succession. The monarch ordered an invasion of the rebellious king's county; Karuṇākara toṇṭaimāṉ offered to lead the Cōḻa army and his offer was accepted.

The description of the huge army that went to Kalinga is replete with hyperbole but not without distinction; the sound effects add to

the very sense of movement and the clang of the armour and the thud of the elephant corps. But the Kalinga king was not particularly impressed or afraid and he readied himself for war.

The battle is joined and fierce and ruthless is the fighting. The battle is described in many verses full of onomatopoeia making the reader feel he is in the thick of the fighting, himself.

The fire from the eyes of the warriors flashed like strokes of lightening, the noise from the bows was thunderous and there was a regular shower of arrows exchanged. Blood flowed like a river, in which the white umbrellas floated like foam; the sundered bodies of the elephants formed the two banks of this sanguinary river. Bowmen went on shooting arrows at the enemy; but their supply of arrows gave out and they were puzzled for a second but not for long; for, they found their chest full of the arrows aimed by the enemy; gratefully they plucked them from their chest and shot them at the foe with their bows. Karuṇākaraṉ was everywhere egging his men on, leading them from the front.

Soon the trend of the war became clear; for the Kalinga forces gave away under the relentless pounding of the Cōḻa army. The Kalinga king Aṉantavaṉmaṉ was routed in single combat by Karuṇ ākaraṉ and fled the field. He sought refuge in a place so secret that the Cōḻa forces could not find it out. Seeing the king routed and fleeing the field, the Kalinga army scattered in panic. The Cōḻa army captured a great deal of booty from the vanquished land. karuṇākaraṉ, the victorious commander-in-chief despoiled the country, as was customary in those days and erected pillars of triumph everywhere.

Then follows a long passage of unmatched gruesomeness where no detail of the holocaust is omitted as too unpleasant to be presented. Just as noble house-holders feel pleased when guests and poor people come in large numbers to eat in their houses, so did the faces of the corpses lying in the field blossom with pleasure as eagles fell on them to eat their flesh. The bees that were constantly

in attendance on the heads of elephants left them when the animals fell slain by the enemy and flew eagerly after the flowers strewn by the Dēvas from the heavens in appreciation of the Cōḻa victory; the behaviour of the bees reminded one of that of prostitutes who forsake the patrons whose wealth is all spent, in favour of new ones who still had it in plenty.

Then follows a description of the ritual feasting of the goblins on the bodies of the warriors laid low in the battle. These spirits bathe in the blood and dress themselves in the sheaths of fat. And they prepare a semisolid food from out of the flesh, the teeth and the blood of the corpses and with much ritual singing where the triumphant Cōḻa king and his commander come in for praise, they feast on this disgusting food, served with the severed heads pierced by javelins as ladles. And the replete goblins entertain themselves with a horrible dance of death all over the battlefield. Thus ends this work on war and its aftermath.

The work is almost wholly sombre in tone but it begins on a gay note of sensuality, where girls wake up each other and gather to sing this *paraṇi* in celebration of the notable Cōḻa victory. In one of the verses girls are described as inserting in their coiffured hair, not only the blood-red *ceṅkaḻunīr* flowers but the dear lives of all the youths of the world. In another, the endearing and highly private, personal conversation the girls have had their husbands the previous night has had an auditor, the caged parrot which embarrassingly repeats the words in the morning in the hearing of everyone; the concerned girls, red with bashfulness try to close the mouth of the parrot. The picture is very similar to the one painted in Sanskrit verse by Amarukavi.

The *Kaliṅkattupparaṇi* has been highly praised by scholars and is one of the few poetical works read even today. Its main attraction is its vigour and its martial spirit which pervades the whole work except for the first few verses given to gay sensuality as

noted above. Its verbal felicity is one of its major attractions and when its verses are read aloud, the listener clearly gets the sense echoed by the words. The poet's patriotism for his own native Cōḻa land is unmistakable. He displays a notable ability in manipulating the metres.

Defects of the work

Here, unfortunately praise should end. It may be seen that the praise mainly is for the surface qualities of the poem, what Coleridge aptly calls its externals. The motif of the poem is merely the victory of a king over another in one of the disgustingly numerous wars which have been the main sport of homo sapiens since his emergence as a species; there is nothing exalted or ennobling in it. It was highly profitable for court poets to panegyrise their patrons and since the royal patrons mostly had nothing much to sing about except their efficiency in destroying others of the same species, *paraṇi* had a certain vogue during the heroic age.

Poets who sang *paraṇi* did not content themselves with a description of the actual war, gory enough though it was. They had to describe the horrible scene of corpses and carcasses strewn about in the battlefield, limbs scattered pell-mell everywhere and blood flowing like a flood through it all. The crowning passage of a *paraṇi* is where the hungry goblins feast on the flesh and drink the blood and frenziedly participate in a dance of death.

Intelligent students of aesthetics would agree that love is the main sentiment that should figure in creative works. Heroism and pathos can figure prominently in them. But the sentiment of disgust and wonder and humour should be used like spice in a savoury dish, very sparingly. Here, there is a heavy dose of the sentiment of disgust which revolts against the finer susceptibilities of the reader. As the only aim of any sentiment in literature (or any branch of art) is to give pleasure and an excess of disgust seriously militates against

that, no poet of deep sensibilities will create a situation where the delight produced through other sentiment is seriously warped by disgust, overdone. Poets like Cayaṅkoṇṭār fail to see that such over-painting of the battle scene and the ruthless destruction of the vanquished land is more dictated by the itch of sycophancy than by the needs of art.

Other major paraṇis

Oṭṭakkūttar, better known as the author of the Ulās has composed a work in this genre, entitled *Takkayākapparaṇi.* The work was composed in the 12th cent. There is a long story told, quite apocryphally, about how the poet came to sing this *paraṇi.* We need not burden ourselves with that here. The one feature of the story that may have elements of truth is that this work shows clear indications of having been composed in haste.

The outline of the plot has been taken from the *purāṇas*. Takkaṉ the father of Siva's spouse Tāṭcāyiṇi performed a sacrifice for which he did not invite Siva. The Lord's consort desired deeply to attend it and despite Siva's remonstrations, she left Kayilai. Siva's anger produced Virapattiraṉ who was commanded to go forth and destroy Takkaṉ's yaga. Accordingly Virapattiraṉ went out with Siva's forces and destroyed the sacrifice; Tāṭcāyiṇi killed herself by entering the fire. This vanquishing of Takkaṉ is celebrated in this *paraṇi* which has all the usual features of works of this genre.

The poet Oṭṭakkūttar was a scholar of the pedantic type and his work shows his mastery of the diction and the nuances of grammar and prosody. The three *Ulās* standing to his name are a better measure of his poesy. The natural inhibitions and limitations inherent in this genre have naturally lowered the poetic level of even such a renowned poet as Oṭṭakkūttār.

The earlier works having been lost, the only secular *paraṇi* we have with us is the *Kaliṅkattupparaṇi.* The *Takkayākapparaṇi* was

not sung in celebration of any royal victory and the core of plot was taken from the *purāṇams.* This itself is a fair indication that there was little 'market' for secular *paraṇis.* The other works in this genre that are known are all of a philosophical mien where the *paraṇi* framework is utilised to present an allegory.

The author of two such works celebrating the victory over ignorance and delusion was Tattuvarāya Cuvāmikaḷ. He was a Madva brahmin who studied Tamil and developed the ability to compose poetry. He studied the path of wisdom under his own uncle Corūpāṉantar who desired that his own and his disciple's spiritual discoveries should be presented to the public through the medium of poetry in which his disciple excelled. So he provoked him to utter and out came a succession of spiritual works which were set in the framework of the *pirapantams* in accord with the literary fashion of the day. His period is estimated variously as the 15th and the 16th cent; tradition puts him back by several centuries. He may have been a follower of Vedanta. Both he and his guru were gifted with rare spiritual powers.

The *paraṇis* are based on plots put together by the poet himself as the medium for the presentation of an allegory. In the *Aññavataipparaṇi* , Añña, the foolish and conceited king, is surrounded by filling advisors like Akaṅkāra and Ulōpa. God sends Ñāṉavinōta with an army and he defeats the erring king. The style employed is forceful and majestic.

A similar story makes do for the plot of *Mōkavataipparaṇi.* To *Maṉam* are born through different wives Mōkaṉ and Vivēkaṉ. Mōkaṉ inherits the kingdom owing to Maṉam's greater affection for Mōkaṉ's mother Apētcai. Mōkaṉ proves a wicked king and he is defeated by Vivēkaṉ who receives the wholehearted support of Corūpāṉantar. This *paraṇi* celebrates the victory of Vivēkaṉ (discriminative faculty) over Mōkaṉ (illusion). Tattuvarāya Cuvāmikaḷ composed another work *Cacivaṉṉapōlam* explaining the principles of Vedanta in simple lan-

guage and inserted this as part of the *Mōkavataipparaṇi*. Tattuvarāyar's versification is elegant and his language simple. The *paraṇi* genre has been used to express philosophical concepts, taking only the fact of war and the victory of one party over the other as the basic framework. His handling of the goblin element is sensible and much of the disgust that inheres in such passages is avoided in his works. He makes the goblins human by vesting them with human foibles, thus achieving the dual purpose of making the passages more interesting and of teaching exalted concepts of ethics and philosophy.

Paḷḷu

Pallu literature as a well-defined branch of minor literature dates from the 16th century A.D. But as in most of these genres, the origin is to be traced among the oldest literary works inTamil and in the sūtras of the oldest Tamil grammar *Tolkāppiyam*. The latter mentions a type of literature (called *pulaṉ*) where the diction is very near to the spoken language of the people and the significance is easily understood without deep thought and, presumably help from scholars (*Tolkāppiyam -Poruḷ Ceyyuḷiyal* 233.) This is, of course, too general a pattern and not only *paḷḷu* but other genres like *Kuṟavañci* can fit into it. There are songs like the *veṭṭuuva vari* in the *Cilappatikāram* which were presumably fashioned on the songs sung by unlettered folk. These are evidences to the general assumption that there was a flourishing tradition of folk songs in Tamil Nadu side by side with the more sophisticated literature; and *paḷḷu* must have originated in the villages and slowly gained literary recognition as one of the genres of minor literature around the 16th century.

The grammar of minor literature *Paṉṉirupāṭṭiyal*, which is ascribable to the 12th century does not, naturally mention this later movement. But it lists *'Uḷattippāṭṭu'* as one of the genres. No work that conform to this is available today. It is possible that *'Paḷḷu'* developed from this genre and as the latter genre was far more comprehensive and interesting , it supplanted the earlier form. There is

evidence for the supposition that *paḷḷu* developed from the more primitive *Uḻattippāṭṭu*, in the *Navanīappāṭṭiyal'*, a grammar of minor literature that belongs to the 14th cent. Some scholars are inclined to continue to regard *Uḻattippāṭṭu* as still extant rather than as one that has been supplanted totally by '*paḷḷu*' . However, they are not able to show any existing literature as coming under the genre, *Uḻattippāṭṭu*.

The different poems coming under this genre have roughly the same story pattern. A landless labourer (the *paḷḷaṉ*) has two wives and predictably devotes all his time in the hut of the younger and more attractive wife to the neglect of his duties. The elder wife complains to the landholder who finds out quickly that her complaint is true and the paḷḷaṉ is punished for neglect of his duties. The labourer begins to work after he is released from his punishment (in which the compassionate elder wife plays an important part); it rains copiously and the fields hum with activity. But trouble does not quite cease between the two wives who quarrel over the quantity of paddy given to each. But peace ensues and the *paḷḷaṉ* begins to lead a life of contentment with his two wives, the *paḷḷis*, now reconciled. On the basic theme, minor changes are rung by the poets.

As can be assumed by all those who have studied the history of this genre, its diction is of the simplest and the metres selected are of simple construction lending themselves to easy handling by untrained village musicians. The atmosphere and the points of view and the problems and even the figures of speech are all wholly rural. Simplicity and directness of approach are the most obvious characteristics of this genre; but simplicity should not be confused with blandness; a student of the best works in this genre will discover that many passages in them go straight to his heart and the lack of sophistication which keeps out a contrived striving after effect proves to be a virtue and a merit rather than a defect. Added

verve in these works results from the natural animosity between the two wives of the hero which is further heated up by religious rancour as they always belong to two different sects.

The best known and best loved among the *paḷḷu* works is the *Mukkūṭaṟpaḷḷu;* its author is unknown. It is clear from the work that he was a staunch Vaiṇava. He is ascribed to the 17th century. Mukkūṭal is the old name of a small town (named so on account of the fact that it stands at the confluence of three rivers); its modern name is Civalappēri.

Now let us enjoy a few notable features of this well-composed work. At the outset, the poet introduces the two most interesting characters of the drama, the two contending *paḷḷis* in a few words bringing out their basic natures. The elder is introduced wearing Vaiṇava sect marks on her forehead, a little advanced in age but still quietly attractive; the younger wears Saiva sect marks and sports stridently youthful features. The peasant hero is obviously a man given more to enjoyment than to hard labour and his personality suggests this tendency. He is a fanatical follower of the Vaiṇava cult and has a very derisive vocabulary to describe those who are outside it.

Almost immediately on their appearance, sharp acrimony flares up between the two co-wives. The elder, indeed, starts the trouble when, in the midst of parading the virtues of her native country, she adds a barbed statement that she is the properly wedded wife of the '*paḷḷaṉ*' not one who entered his household as a casual 'extra'. The younger woman is not to be counted out in a war of words. She praises her own native town and adds that she loved and was loved back and that was how she entered his household, not like some others who joined the establishment as suppliants for gruel. The language employed in this duel is dignified and interesting; it introduces a verve at the very beginning of the work.

As the cuckoo starts singing in Tamil country at the beginning of the rainy season, the Tamils thought that its song harbingers the rains which sustain all the land. There is a section in all *paḷḷu* works devoted to an almost ritual prayer to the bird to start singing. The prayers uttered by the three principal characters reflect their individual loyalties too by way of territory and cult. There are also regular worship rituals conducted to propitiate the minor gods whom it was necessary to pacify through offerings of toddy and the flesh of animals sacrificed.

The Cuckoo sings, the gods are propitiated and signs of rains are clearly seen in the sky. The song describing them is highly singable and set in a happy tune.

Signs of floods
of tomorrow are seen
In lightning flashes
in Kerala skies,
In lightning flashes
in Laṅkan skies.
From yesterday
a cyclone blows
Bending round
the twigs in the trees,
The spotted frog
from deep in the well
Is sounding off
in a monotone.
The crab in the mire
has started digging.
The vāṉampāṭi
athirst for rain
Sings out in bliss
and dances away. (7)

(The vāṉampāṭi is a fancied bird more balladised than seen)

The signs are not liars and it rains copiously. The rivers are in flood and joyful fishes jump in the freshes. As many as 37 varieties of fish are mentioned in the work. The peasants and their wives are ecstatic at this bounty and sing in joy.

But rains and floods mean hard labour compressed into a few days. Auspicious day and time are fixed and the ploughing starts sowing and transplantation of the seedlings follow. But so does the verbal acrimony between the co-wives when the differences in their religious denomination come in for a good deal of adverse comment, the elder reviling Siva and the younger lambasting Tirumāl. But the moment the elder points to her age and stars lamenting that even age is not respected, the younger one surrenders, perhaps touched by her senior's years and perhaps encouraged by the other's open acceptance of her rival's youth, the legal tender in the country of love. There are interesting pen portraits of the ugly manager of the farm, the punishment visited on the paḷḷaṉ for his negligence and laziness, and the reactions of the two wives to the embarrassment suffered by him. The poem pays rich tributes to many philanthropists and leaders of the cult.The battles conclude and peace and joy rule the countryside at the end of this enjoyable poem.

Other works in the Genre

The *Tiruvārūrppaḷḷu* composed by Kamalai Ñāṉappirakācar has the credit of being the pioneering work in this genre. On account of its contents, it has an alternative title, *Ñāṉappaḷḷu*. It is a short work of only 72 verses. The author uses the same story with only cosmetic changes. But we miss the light touch and the truly literary flavour of the *Mukkūṭaṟppaḷḷu* here. In this poem, unlike in the later work, there are a number of stanzas presented in the author's version, predictably on Saiva themes. As the purpose of the author was to use this popular medium to propagate Saivism, the literary quality

has inevitably suffered. The verve, the tempo, the audacity of the *'paḷḷis'* in the later work are not seen in their full glory in this essentially religious work.

Here the senior *'paḷḷi* as well as the *paḷḷaṉ* are Saivas while the junior *paḷḷi* is a Vaiṇava. Their verbal battle is duly presented as a battle of the cults. The manager of the farm is pictured as a shoddy person open to ridicule. The worship of the lesser gods is played down in this work. The level of poetry rises while describing the farming activities. In the songs devoted to praise of the Lord of Tiruvārūr, the poet has introduced themes of love which make them interesting reading.

The *Kurukūrppaḷḷu* has a distinction in that it praises, not the Lord, but one of His pre-eminent devotees, Nammāḻvār who was born in Kurukūr. It was composed by Caṭakōpappulavar who may have flourished in the late 17th century or early in the 18th. The story pattern, the character traits, the cult wars, the descriptions of nature- all the elements of *paḷḷu* are present here. The poet has not made major changes in the general scheme of the *paḷḷu* genre. He has devoted less space to certain scenes like the coming of the 'paḷḷis and their boastful descriptions of their native countries. The one important change he has introduced is that both the paḷḷis are Vaiṇavas, thereby taking away the rancorous verbal exchanges between them; but the work consequently loses one of the chief attractions of the genre. The scene where the Paḷḷaṉ renders account to the manager is done with some innovativeness involving the use of pun through which the paḷḷaṉ tries to conceal his duplicity. Another minor innovation made is in the senior paḷḷi accusing her cowife of having administered a potion prepared according to the rules of black magic to keep the paḷḷaṉ under her thumb. There are 15 stanzas in this work on the standard love themes. The literary quality of the work is reasonably good, considering how its purpose is clearly to promote the cult of worship of a Vaiṇava devotee.

There is a *Vaiyāpurippaḷḷu*, to promote the Muruka cult composed by a rich land holder. There is a Christian *paḷḷu* too, called *Ceṇpakarāmaṉ paḷḷu*. They follow the same story outline and possess average literary merit.

Kuṟavañci

The origin of this genre is clearly the passages in *Caṅkam* literature and in *Tolkāppiyam* referring to a girl from the Kuṟavar community spelling out the future of a girl smitten by love. Later on, in the grammar on minor literature there is a reference to *Kuṟattippāṭṭu* as a genre of very limited length. These early concepts were developed into a full-fledged literary genre, *Kuṟavañci* which has a dramatic set-up and flavour and is proving very popular in today's media of mass entertainment.

The story structure is simple. A girl in love is not sure (as most girls in love are not, in life and in literature) if her lover will ever come and marry her. A woman from the hill tribes comes and presages a bright and happy future for her with her lover whom she names; she is given rich presents on which she is joined by her hunter husband and all is bliss. Like the *paḷḷu* works, there is natural flavour of the soil and the free and direct talk and life patterns of the non-elite folk presented with a literary sauce. *Kuṟavañci* differs from '*paḷḷu*' in the important respect of the elite playing an important part in it in the shape of the girl in love and her maid and friends. Hence there is a meeting of two utterly different levels of society here, making for a good deal of variety.

The oldest known work of this genre, the *Kuṟṟālakkuṟavañci* by Tirikūṭarācappakkavirāyar is also the best of its kind. The story line indicated above is followed in this with elegant variations enhancing its value. 'Vacantavalli' is the girl who is smitten with the grand passion on seeing the Lord of Tirukkuṟṟālam coming in the streets in procession. The *kuṟatti* is Ciṅki, very picturesquely portrayed in

rich, evocative diction. The *kuravan* is a fine physical specimen, decked in the natural products of the forest where he makes his living.

The descriptions are felicitous. There is no stark tragedy rearing its ugly head anywhere in the work and the spirit is gay, efflorescent. If the girl is worried in her love-lorn state, all that disappears with the words of bubbling optimism from Ciṅki, presaging a happy fulfillment of her desires and a requital of her love. The *kuravan*'s unease in not being able to locate his Ciṅki is only shortlived, for on the advice of his friend he seeks her in Kurrālam and locates her returning after her highly successful session of omen-reading for Vacantavalli. The characters may taste anxiety, unease for the moment, but relief is round the corner. When the serious literature outside these supposedly minor works was all about man's transience in this world and the torments of hell, it is most refreshing to read works of this type where a strident, gay optimism is the prevailing sentiment.

One of the major descriptive passages in the work is where the women of Kurrālam all flock to see and drink in the surpassing handsomeness of Lord Siva. In their hurry not to miss the spectacle, they are described as putting on the wrong garments at the wrong places and applying unguent to one of the eyes and rushing out of their houses. They feel a basic injustice in the situation; for, listen to their complaint.

He made our dark tresses
Hang loose, dishevelled;
And he appropriated
The bangles on our wrists!
He wears matted hair,
The sign of renunciation.
How can he stoop so low
As to perpetrate such wrongs? (6/12) (8)

Vacantavalli comes, filling even feminine hearts with desire; her glances are so rich with artful coquetry, they stage a play for deluding the onlookers. Along with her friends she engages herself in a ball-game, described by the gifted poet in a playful, quick-moving metre. She happens to see the Lord of 'Kuṟṟālām' coming in the street in procession during this game and is instantly smitten with love for Him.

Her love-lorn condition is described in the traditional manner; sandal paste burns her skin and fanning only increases the burning sensation. Flowers on her wither quickly away and pearls burst with the heat. Vacantavalli rebukes the moon for burning her with flaming rays, secure in the protection afforded to it by the Lord who gave a special position (as part of His body) to His consort. She remonstrates with the god of love, too. All the conventional steps are gone through but in simple, elegant Tamil.

'Vacantavalli' eventually sends her maid as a messenger to her lover who, she says, once came down to intercede on behalf of Cuntaramūrtti Nāyaṉār and in pursuance of that actually went as a messenger to Paravai Nācciyār. Now she has nothing to do but wait for her return; she spends the time consulting omens in the manner of all love-lorn girls, with the devices available at home.

Now, at this psychologically appropriate time comes the *kuṟatti*, her coming being presented in appropriate language by the poet. Ciṅki who is beautiful in her own way comes adorned in what is procurable in her surroundings and acceptable to her class. In a short work, as many as twelve stanzas are spent in portraying this mountain girl who, after all, is the real heroine of the piece.

She is warmly welcomed by Vacantavalli who asks for a description of her mountain home and surroundings and Ciṅki obliges with pleasure with a long and interesting account of the natural

resources, following up with a narration of the customs and the way of life of her community. Her mountain is so high, elephants roaming on its slopes stop the moon on its tracks under the impression it is their food rolled into a ball. It is so prosperous, so blessed with all desirable things that when the farmers burn a forest to plant millet, the smell of *akil* and saffron and sandal fills the air. She concludes her long account with a none-too-modest assessment of her own special ability in the art of prediction and a catalogue of her triumphs and the presents she had obtained from all over India and even Sri Lanka.

When invited by Vacantavalli to give predictions about herself, Ciṅki describes the various omens she notices around her involving birds and others. She then asks the girl to show her land and she begins to read the palm. She is able to see clearly that Vacantavalli is in love with the Lord Tirikūṭanātar who had come in procession not much long ago.

On hearing the name mentioned, the girl becomes bashful and puts her head down in confusion. On seeing this Ciṅki makes mild fun of her and assures her that the Lord will send her His garland of *koṉṟai* flowers as a token of acceptance of her love. On this Vacantavalli is pleased beyond measure and showers her with all kinds of jewels.

In the meantime Ciṅkaṉ who has been engaged in hunting begins to feel the absence of Ciṅki and leaving off his professional pursuit, he starts looking for her, saying he wants nothing more than lying on Ciṅki's bosom even like the bra she is wearing. He does not find her easily as the *kuṟavar* community is given to restless roving. Finally he locates her, after agreat deal of lamentation, in Kuṟṟālam "like a man who had lost and found a valued object." Ciṅkaṉ praises the many qualities of Ciṅki, indeed goes into ecstasies over them like a bee after imbibing a lot of honey.

But discipline is discipline and the stern husband demands to know where she had been wandering. Ciṅki tells him the story of her happy sally at omen-reading and palmistry after a certain bandying of words and the couple is quickly transported to the seventh heaven of bliss.

Apart from the customary virtues of dexterity at punning and at sound effects the poet is truly blessed with the skill and the insight to see deep into human nature without regard to the social levels of the characters and report in felicitous diction what he had discovered. He seems to taunt the elitist reader for supposing that the lower classes have no pride of birth and association, that they are wholly moved by commercial considerations all the time. The rough-and tumble-love life of Ciṅkaṉ and Ciṅki reveals this and much more. We learn much and get wiser even as we enjoy reading this delicious piece of minor literature.

From the viewpoint of a genre, the work is centred on a gypsy girl giving predictions to a girl hopelessly in love; this central motif will not occupy more than 20-30 stanzas normally. This central concept has been bedecked with the story of how the girl happened to meet her man and fall in love with him, at the beginning and with the story of how the *kuṟatti* herself finds requital with her husband who had been missing her. These two accounts added in the beginning and in the end give a rounded appearance to the thin central concept which, by itself cannot fully satisfy the appetite of all the readers. The older *kuṟattip pāṭṭu* did not have these added attractions perhaps, and it is not surprising that we have no authentic creative works of that classification. In the hands of gifted poets like Tirikūṭarācappar, it could metamorphose into a rounded genre with flesh and blood which can be attractive reading to a wide range of discerning readers.

Other works in the Genre

Another *Kuṟavañci* work that has earned repute is the one sung on the Tañcāvūr king Carfoji, entitled *Carapēntirapūpālak Kuṟavañci*. The poet who composed this was the author of other works of minor literature, too, Civakkoḷuntutēcikar by name, of Koṭṭaiyūr near Kumpakōṇam. On account of his all-round poetic ability, he was made court poet by King Carpoji who was a great patron of learning and himself a scholar.

Here Carfoji takes the place of Lord Tirikūṭanātar and Mataṉavalli that of Vacantavalli. In most respects it runs similar to the earlier work though in details it differs, particularly because a real, living king was involved and the place where the action takes place is the riverine 'Kāviri' delta and not the mountains terrain of Kuṟṟālam. The *Kuṟatti* hails from Nēri hills and yields nothing in sauciness and verve of language and poise and aplomb to the *kuṟatti* of the other work. We have all the descriptions of hills and hunters' activities in this too, serving to create an atmosphere of *kuṟiñci* where the prevailing stage of romance as laid down by tradition is the incipient first steps of a burgeoning love.

The lamentations of the love-lorn Mataṉavalli are nicely rendered here. She rebukes the moon and says, " You go on travelling showering red-hot rays of flaming fire on me. So, rightly have you been punished by the Lord who made you wander, supportless in the limitless skies!" She sent her mind, in her impetuous eagerness, as her messenger to the king; but it did not come back, being engrossed in the contemplation of the king' s personality. This is a common theme in all Indian literature, used with advantage in creative works on love.

The poet lovingly describes the fertility and the pleasing scenery of the riverine town Tañcāvūr. Every flower blooms there on account of the fertility of the soil and the abundance of water. But

the *kāntaḷ* the beautiful red flower, a native of the hills does not bloom there. The poet will not accept this as a deprivation suffered by his favourite town. Those who are afraid of facing society are most likely to run away to the hills. The *kāntaḷ* which was blossoming in the riverine basin earlier, got so discouraged at seeing the comely red palm of Mata̲navalli that, out of a reluctance to face society after its resounding defeat (literally) at the hands of the girl, ran away from Tañcāvūr and hid itself in the mountain region. The author, a court-poet of one of the splendid courts of India of that time, shows greater sophistication than the other; but that is not necessarily a merit in the case of this genre where the folk flavour should dominate.

A third work in this genre entitled *Kumpēcar Ku̲ravañci* is also known. The poet's name is Pāpanāca Mutaliyār; very little is known about him. There are good descriptions of the wonderfully fertile river basin around Kumpakōṇam where the action lies. Most of the poet's concepts have been taken from the reputed poets like Kampaṉ and Cēkkiḻār paying testimony more to his scholarship than to his innovative imagination. His diction and control over the metres are quite good. Here the love between a human girl Jaka̲nmōki̲ni and Lord Kumpēcar of Kumpakōṇam is panegyrised and Ciṅka̲n and Ciṅki are the representatives from the hill-folk.

There is a fourth work by the great Kumarakuruparar called *Maturai Mi̲nāṭciyammai ku̲ram* which too is formally filed in this category, despite the obvious differences. This work more strictly corresponds to the classification '*ku̲rattippāṭṭu*' which, we saw was the precursor to the '*ku̲ravañci*'. This *ku̲ram* by the saintly religious poet differs from the *ku̲ravañci* in that it lacks the first part where the lovers meet for the first time and the third part where the hill-folk couple meet and feel fulfilled in their reunion. One reason why the first part could not be worked into the *ku̲ram*, obviously, was

that Mīṉāṭci meets the Lord only at the end of a triumphant career of conquests everywhere else; it had been predicted that her third breast would disappear the moment she sets her eyes on her future husband when she will be visited, for the first time in her war-filled life, by an attack of effeminate bashfulness. If she is shown as meeting the Lord earlier, there would be serious complications, in view of all this. The reason why the poet chose not to sing on the third part of an usual *kuṟavañci* is not clear; perhaps he wanted his readers to retain in their minds, the picture of the predictions about the Goddess and Her consort and did not like to erase it with a picture of *kuṟatti* and her spouse; the reason may be purely religious. The work has very felicitous diction and happy pictures of Maturai city. Some scholars doubt if Kumarakuruparar actually composed this.

KŌVAI

Kōvai ranks as one of the most important and easily the most interesting of the various genres coming under the classification of minor literature. The semantic significance of the word is merely an ordered sequence; when it refers to a genre, it describes a kind of work where the various stages of love as adumbrated in the *Tolkāppiyam*' and panegyrised in the many love lyrics of the *Caṅkam* epoch each gets a stanza, making four hundred in all. These steps and therefore the stanzas follow the chronological order of happening, of course, assuming that all the different experiences happen to the same loving pair. The metre for this is prescribed; it is the comely and flexible *Kaṭṭaḷaikkalitturai*. As the many stages of love which are quite subtle have to be sung about and the work should contain four hundred verses on the same theme of love, there is a traditional belief that it is a difficult job to compose in this genre and a poet is well advised to try his hand at other forms and gather experience before taking up this.

While the general pattern is this, there are *kōvais* with more than four hundred verses, the poets devoting more than one verse to some stages. Also some *kōvais* omit some stages and introduce some new ones. There are some poets who, this being Tamil Nadu, took it as a challenge compose hundreds of verses on just one stage; these are called *'Oruturaikkōvai'* (*kōvais* on one stage only). While every *kōvai* should have love as the prevailing motif and some poets have composed works in a secular vein, others have used this popular genre to propagate the religious spirit.

Tirukkōvaiyār

In fact, the first notable work of this genre happens to be a religious poem, the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, composed by Māṇikkavācakar. There are some difficulties in singing a *kōvai* with the Lord as the hero; though poets solve them in different ways, they constitute one of the reasons why secular *kōvais* reach a higher literary level not attained by the ones with a religious motif. Some of these will become apparent as we progress further in the discussion. Despite these, the *Tirukkōvaiyār* remains a passable literary work and a reasonably good illustration of the structure and possibilities of this genre.

The work begins with the scene when the girl meets the young man in a flowery bower, producing an impression on him that he is confronted with a moving flower garland. Then after a momentary doubt whether the girl is a fairy or a goddess (generated on account of her bewitching beauty) he decides she is human and love is born. Everywhere, in this work, even though the fortunes of an unnamed pair of lovers are supposed to form the central motif, the Lord of Tillai is brought in at every point for some reason on other; this makes the stanzas sound a little unnatural and this certainly affects the literary quality of the entire work.

The girl is clearly very much in love with the boy but does not utter; when he becomes anxious to hear her talk, she smiles and he

is fulfilled. He sends her away assuring that the same god of love and marriages who made them meet alone, unaccompanied by her friends and his friends would arrange for further meetings. Everywhere analogies are based on religious symbols and religious concepts; everything good is compared to Tillai (Citamparam) and everything unpleasant to those men and women who do not feel any devotion towards the Lord.

Love proceeds on its tortuous path; the capable and intrepid girl friend of the girl arranges for several clandestine meetings between the lovers during day time and then during the night. Seeing the lover disinclined to ask for her hand in marriage and desiring to prolong the courtship, the friend of the girl creates difficulties in the way of their clandestine meetings, so that driven by unrequited passion, he might proceed to arrange for an open wedding. She does this by various means, by pointing to him the many dangers that lie in wait for the hapless person who walks the nightly path. She sometimes uses guile by telling the girl all this in the hearing of the hero whose arrival at the trysting place she pretends not to have noticed.

Anxiety mounts in the girl's camp on the friend noticing the rapid development of the girl's breasts and other signs of her sexual maturity; for, the parents and the kinsmen would not fail to notice them and once they get wise to them, they are bound to start negotiations for her marriage to someone (and not necessarily to the boy whom no one except the girl and her friend is likely to think of in the light of a bridegroom). Very soon, what she fears actually begins to happen; for the kinsmen start preparations for her marriage and the formal rite of 'decking the girl with gold ' is gone through. The friend appeals feelingly to the hero pointing to all this bustle and stir in the house and suggests to him some quick action -either for him to come with his kinsmen to ask formally for her hand or if he is uncertain about his being accepted by the girl's parents, for him to

elope with her at dead of night. She pleads with him for a quick and decisive step by him as the girl cannot escape with all the watch being maintained and if their union is delayed, she would die like a fish kept out of water.

The hero decides to act as suggested by the friend of the girl . The girl hears of this and though she is happy she pauses to reflect how her quality of bashfulness that had grown up with her has quite lost its fierce battle with love and is facing extinction; she now curses it desiring that it should not be born in the families of young girls for seven generations. This extreme dislike of bashfulness on the part of the girl is not very psychological; for after all the quality is intended by nature to protect young girls from going astray, particularly valuable in the Tamil society where girls enjoyed a unique degree of freedom. The *Cankam* girl's attitude of deep pity for this quality of hers which had been waging a losing battle is far more natural and in accord with propriety and psychology (*Kuruntokai* 149). And the *Cankam* poem furnishes a superb metaphor for the plight of this quality before which Māṇikkavācakar's pales into insignificance. For, in the *Cankam* poem, bashfulness is compared to a sandy bank and love to the hungry waters which erode the bank slowly and finally destroy it. Bashfulness acts as safeguard to young, unmarried girls against the predatory sallies of lustful males; the *Cankam* simile is most appropriate. But perhaps it is unfair to compare devotional verse, particularly of Māṇikkavācakar with *Cankam* poetry.

The day and time of the elopement are fixed and the devoted friend brings the girl to the place agreed upon at dead of night where the hero is anxiously waiting for her. The friend hands her over to him with the admonition that he should continue to care for her all through life; if his affection suffers a dimunition, the oceans will dry up and the Vedas will go out of vogue. The hero tells his girl that their journey would be pleasant, the woods on the way will be

cool, and nice to look at and there would be small towns set near each other all the way to Tillai.

The couple see some men from a distance and the girl is filled with fear; the hero assuages her fear saying, "I fear only your kinsmen coming for I cannot fight them. But if brigands come in any numbers, armed to the teeth, I shall fight them fearlessly and rout them all." Back at home the foster-mother laments on learning that her girl had eloped with her lover the previous night. The loving acts of the girl done with reinforced affection in the recent past towards her foster-mother now strike her as an elaborate leave-taking on the eve of her elopement. These poems inevitably remind us of those exquisite poems in '*Kuṟuntokai*', '*Naṟṟiṇai*' and '*Akanāṉūṟu*' where the foster-mother laments over the girl going away with a little-known youth, travelling over waterless wastes leaving behind everything that she had loved earlier. And again one is surprised how later poets, writing on the same theme, who had the benefit of the wisdom of these great pieces could write such mediocre verse and feel requited.

The poem proceeds, making a fresh start on the assumption that the parents of the girl are reasonable and willing to consider the hero's overtures, rendering elopement unnecessary. A whole lot of stanzas are composed on the attempts made to bring about a public wedding. Then we get to the passage where the hero has to proceed to distant countries to earn money with which to run the household after the wedding; sometime he leaves on the king's errand or to complete his education. The woes of the love-lorn girl are then described in great detail; the days are somehow passed but the nights are particularly cruel to her, as the whole world is asleep and she alone cannot sleep. The best passages here are where Māṇikkavācakar adopts *Caṅkam* concepts wholesale.

After wedding, the hero begins to go astray, giving plenty of opportunity to the poet to sing of the wife's anguish and the hero 's attempts to mollify her. Here there is a verse where the wonder of the hero is registered effectively. His wonder is at the constancy of the girl whose love he has betrayed. For even when he is preoccupied with other thoughts, she having no other thoughts except for him, enters his heart and occupies it. When he begins to think of her, she floods his heart as a river in freshes flowing from a high level to a point lower in level.

The hero comes back and entry is first refused by the irate friend of the wife and after persuasion is allowed. The wife is happy but there is a lurking feeling in her that her husband's conduct earlier was reprehensible. The friend, as usual and in conformity with her typecast role makes peace pointing out that the hero by his nature desires to benefit everyone including the prostitutes. It is not any part of the wife's look out to keep such a personality locked up for her own benefit. "Accept him as he is and all will be well". With these words of wise counsel, the work comes to a close.

Other kōvai works

'Pāṇṭikkōvai ' is the first work in this genre, ascribable to the seventh century A.D. This is a work with a secular motif which clearly served as the model for Māṇikkavācakar who came later. *Tirukkōvaiyār* is easily the most popular of all the *kōvai* works and commentaries have been written on it. This represent's the priorities in Tamil Nadu in the last one thousand years. While great works of undoubted literary merit which can cross swords with the best anywhere in the world have been neglected to the point of near-extinction, this work of average literary merit enjoys a position of the highest prestige, entirely on account of its religious contents. Sometimes the present writer embarks upon a wholly speculative sally,

wondering how it would be if one kind of work had been written by a different poet, other than its author. If, in that mood, he envisages a *kōvai*, breathing the religious spirit being composed by Ñāṉacampantar, Appar or Cuntarar, such a *kōvai*, written by one of them, is bound to be of a considerably higher quality as a literary work than Māṇikkavācakar's *Tirukkōvaiyār*. They yielded nothing in religious fervour to the later saint but they were gifted with a truly innovative imagination, a creative faculty that marks off a true poet from a mere versifier, however talented he may be in other respects.

Let us now take up for brief study the *Ampikāpatikkōvai*, highly regarded by some critics as a truly literary work of imagination, ascribed to Ampikāpati, the son of Kampar. In this work, there is genuine sentiment expressed in many of the stanzas unlike most *'Kōvai'* verses where the attempt seems to be only to compose in strict accord with the rules laid down for each stage of love. Thus the hero bewails the resistance offered by the natural quality of bashfulness that never leaves a girl whatever her own feelings may be, wondering when he shall be blessed with true requital from her. For, her eyes make incessant war on the hapless youth and the smile in her face that resembles the moon torments him without respite, day and night unlike the moon that comes up only in the night.

When the hero has to leave her even for a short while, he realises that she may die of the pangs of separation. But a man has sometimes to go forth and do things expected of him and this means separation from his ladylove. And such a separation makes his own mental state deplorable. The hero laments commenting bitterly that in this deplorable mental state he is further weakened by the contemplation of what would happen to her, the girl of his heart. What support, he demands to know, can he except to have in such a predicament, with nothing going his way.

The girl is in no happier position. She would very much like to keep her love a closely guarded secret; she does not take even her bosom friend into confidence in this matter. But her behaviour becomes so peculiar on account of her strong attachment for the boy that she continually draws attention to herself. She used to love flowers before, but now does not wear them. She criticises the moon where, earlier she loved playing ball games with her friends in the moonlit front porch. She had lost her appetite and her keen interest in food. She scarcely moved, the once restless girl who *never could stand still for a moment. She appeared to harbour something* in her heart but would not be drawn to a frank talk about it. She preferred to be alone and often stood looking at the void for a long time. The people in the house noticed these unusual symptoms in her and wondered. The bosom friend did not stop there but privately pressed her for the truth which she eventually revealed to her.

The friend then literally takes over the girl's case and begins to play a vital role in their love. When the young man turns up when they are watching the millet crop with a plea to tell him where the deer could have disappeared, the one he was hunting, she gives him pert replies which make him smile in amused appreciation. She has a mischievous mind, slightly tinged with sadism and she sometimes likes to watch the young man suffer torments by concealing the girl and herself very near the trysting place just before his arrival. But there is a purpose in this apparent act of cruelty for such an occasion brings out the true love the young man bears to the girl which she can watch and appreciate to assure her own mind and still her doubts.

The young man seems disinclined to ask for the girl's hand but continues to meet her of nights in great secrecy. The girl asks her friend to advise him to stop coming of nights treading the dangerous mountain path. But when he goes home after the nightly

tryst, she pleads with her heart to go out as her messenger to him to present her pitiable state of body and mind to him; then a little later, she demands to know from her heart what exactly it told him and what he had said in reply. In the meantime he has to leave to acquire wealth and both feel the pangs of separation keenly. He looks at the clouds proceeding in the direction of her village and asks them what it is that they are going in such a hurry to tell her, when they would find her at the end of her emotional tether.

The young people in love find that their parents, may not bless the wedding and decide to elope. When casual passers-by notice them travelling in the desert, they infer they are eloping and wonder with tenderness how the woman who bore this comely girl is bearing up this separation from her daughter. Her mother laments at home, asking, "Is there the pet bird you are so fond of, in that desert? Will you find there the toys you always play with here, will you be able to build those playful little mud houses in the desert? Will you be able to find me, and your kinsmen and your friends there? Tell me, my girl. Will you find any of these there in those waterless, inhospitable wastes?" Her anguish is complete when the foster-mother who had resolutely gone forth to bring the fugitives back returns alone to report that the young persons had proceeded too fast for her to catch them, destined for his bustling city at a great distance from their place.

Even though bowed down by too much structurisation, the poet who composed this *kōvai*, Ampikāpati, by tradition, displays some qualities which lift him above the level of the minor litterateurs. He demonstrates what could be done even in such a formal, stylized genre as *'kōvai'* by breathing genuine sentiment into his stanzas. *'Kōvai'* offers plenty of opportunity for pathos. The girl and, to a lesser extent, the lover display anxiety when they are unable to meet; the girl displays anxiety even when he comes to the tryst as she anticipates some harm befalling him while traversing the danger

-filled mountain path.There is plenty of anguish suffered on account of separation of short or long duration. The foster-mother and the natal mother feel desolate at the elopement of the lovers. Ampikāpati injects genuine emotion into these passages making them read as creative pieces rather than as illustrations of the grammar rules.

Ampikāpati 's descriptive power and his control over the metre are excellent. He does not spend a large part of this flexible metre, as Māṇikkavācakar does, in repeatedly describing Tillai but uses it to portray well-designed symbols which help to evoke the sentiment. His poetic diction is rich and graphic and his use of the figures of speech facile but restrained to serve the exigencies of art. The combination of these qualities makes the study of his work a genuinely pleasing aesthetic exercise. It is a pity we know nothing about the gifted author.

But in India, in Tamil Nadu especially, we should be grateful that the work which deals with a secular (in contradistinction from a religious) motif was not allowed to be lost as others have been.

There is another *kōvai* work with a secular motif, the *Tañcaivāṇaṉkōvai* composed by Poyyāmoḻippulavar who is ascribed to the 13th century. This was written as illustrative of the rules of *akam* as framed by Nāṟkavirāca Nampi and this grammar and its illustrative literary piece are invariably studied together in Tamil Nadu. Even though this work was designed to illustrate rules of grammar, it is not be disparaged as a piece of creative literature and deserves a quick review here.

The young man, infatuated with the girl whom he comes across in the bower praises her in the hyperbolic manner very familiar to readers of Indian literature : "Your face is so bright, so flawless that the moon who shares some of your qualities now has become ashamed of the hare-like smudge in him (which you do not suffer from) and is circumambulating the Meru mountain seeking a medicine to rid

himself of it!". When, after getting better acquainted with him, she feels suddenly anguished at the possibility that he may leave her, he says movingly that there is no question of his leaving her; for apart from the anguish it shall cause her, he cannot survive even a moment, if separated from her. Though this is a conventional idea, it has been forcefully expressed here.

But short spells of separation do occur and the girl feels it deeply and is so unhappy, she is unable to sleep at night. She ruefully reflects that despite the cold outside brought about by the night, the fire he roused in her during the union was still unquenched, keeping her miserable, awake all the long night through. But when he does come laden with mango shoots as his present to her, the friend of the girl refuses to accept it in order, perhaps to bring him to a boil. The young man feels miserable, saying that the mango shoots he had brought with him are withering just as he was, both of them performing penance to obtain her favour.

He ruminates dolefully how his heart which went in search of her is unable to find her, how she is proving very hard to please and how his life is ebbing away owing to this insuperable difficulty in establishing any meaningful relationship with her. But soon an arrangement is worked out with the friend that he would meet the girl at nights at a rendezvous fixed for the purpose. He is delighted and starts coming every night to be with his girl. But the friend discovers his reluctance to ask for the girl's hand in marriage and in order to urge him towards that desirable consummation, she tries to put obstacles in the way of their meeting. She tells him how the girl is feeling miserable at the dangers he is facing everyday in treading the mountain path where the lightning flashes cough up fire and the lion stalks the elephant for its food. The mountain chieftain frustrates her by declaring that he was not afraid of lions, wild boars and serpents and perseveres in his nightly visits.

But sometimes the timing goes wrong or some difficulty arises

and they fail to meet at the tryst. She goes there and fails to find him and leaves unhappy, unfulfilled. He comes after she leaves and returns frustrated. The girl visits the trysting place after sunrise and laments saying, "He came after I left; did he intend conveying to me that he did come though late to the rendezvous, by placing a lotus flower on a conch?".

The many different snags in the way of their meeting at their clandestine tryst at dead of night are described with verve. The mother does not sleep, is watchful and wide awake ; the dog seems to need no sleep at all and is ready to bark its head off, alerting the whole village; the people of the village too are awake, all of them anguished perhaps at the separation from a dearly loved member of each one of the families or in sympathy at the heroine's plight !. To make matters worse, the owl begins to hoot and even the cock starts crowing, most prematurely. To confound matters further, the moon comes out in all its glory rendering concealment difficult. These are the bitter reflections of the girl when waiting for the all-important signal (usually the call of a bird, imitated by the young man). And she begs passionately of her friend who bears more love to her than her own mother ever can, to plead with the lover to desist from walking the perilous nightly path.

The loyal friend goes out to tell the young man that the physical and mental deterioration of the girl caused by the short spells of separation and long spells of anxiety has attracted the attention of the mother who, concerned, has organised a ritual session with the temple priest who would get into a trance and reveal the source of her trouble. She explains to him in detail how the marriage season is with them already, pointing to the *vēṅkai* trees flowering and the moon developing a halo; and she urges him to gather courage and ask for the hand of the girl in marriage from her father. To lend greater weight to her words and to impel the young man to hasten the wedding, she stops altogether the tryst both by day and by

night, psychologically arguing with the protesting girl that only if these clandestine unions are put an end to will the frustrated youth make up his mind to seek the parents' blessing for an open wedding. And she touchingly asks him in a fine stanza if there can be a better boat for her than his wide hero's chest to cross the sea of trouble caused by non-requital

There is the inevitable interlude when the young man has to leave for distant countries to accumulate wealth. And the anguish of the girl is described in eloquent verse. He returns urging his charioteer to drive faster, for he very much fears that after all this delay in coming back, the girl cannot keep alive if one more evening is interposed before their reunion.

With the confusion inevitable in a genre like this where some of the stages regarded by the earlier grammarians as mutually exclusive alternatives are all exploited together without any discrimination, the poet describes the lovers eloping and getting married without the parents being present and a formal wedding in the presence and the active participation of the parents. The scenes where the girl is brought secretly by the devoutly loyal friend to the rendezvous, the plight of the young lovers, the remarks of the passer-by, the rigours of the desert path and the ease with which the girl in love bears these tribulations are all well painted with due sentiment. The stanzas are deftly executed with artistic grace and the poetic sentiment well presented in this work. The major defect is that the poet, moved more by commercial than by aesthetic considerations has chosen to devote more than 25% of his work (a line or more of every stanzas) to a panegyrical reference to his patron. But for this, the work may well be considered a worthy successor to Ampikāpati's great poem.

Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ of Tuṟaimaṅkalam who belonged to the 17th century was an ascetic of the Saiva order, who composed

several works of intense religious flavour in many of the popular genres of minor literature. His *Tiruveṅkaikkōvai* was composed when he stayed in that holy place; he made his stay there memorable by performing a miracle. His most famous work is the *Pirapuliṅkaḷīlai*, an epic whose contents are of wholly religious interest, which has already been discussed.

His *kōvai* work is cast in the same outline as the other works of this genre and though an ascetic, he composes this entirely love -dominated work with the proper emphasis on the various aspects of the grand passion, taking care only to introduce the name of the Lord of Tiruveṅkai with a few attributes in every stanza. The name of the hero of the love situations has not been disclosed, in accord with the prohibiting rule in *Tolkāppiyam*. We shall select and savour only a few stanzas from this work here.

The boy and the girl meet unaccompanied and love is born. After the natural initial hesitancy, the girl smiles indicating her love for him and the young man goes into ecstasies over this, saying "The Lord of Tiruveṅkai smiled in anger (to destroy the three cities). But this most handsome girl with the moon-like face smiles out of affection and a tender feeling towards me. Truly her smile is the one boat for me to cross this sea of passion!". Then, in due time, a daytime tryst is fixed and the young man comes regularly for meeting her. As the millet gets harvested, night tryst is fixed and the devoted lover braves the dangers of the nightly mountain path to be with her. It is rainy season and the girl wonders how he is able to pick his way through the intense darkness reinforced by the rain.

Despite the utmost care and secrecy, their meetings are noticed by the inquisitive neighbours and a scandalous gossip goes the rounds, reaching the ears of the girl and her friend. The girl laments saying that it is a pity that the Lord of Tiruveṅkai who can remove the pain caused by the flower arrows of Cupid whom he quelled cannot

ward off the mental pain generated by this gossip circulating in the neighbourhood. Meetings are banned by the irate mother who, too, had heard the gossip and the girl is beside herself with grief. Now waking time becomes hell for her and on the few nights when she is able to sleep, dreaming of her breasts resting on her lover's shoulders was heaven itself. After a great deal of grieving, they decide to elope and the passers-by wonder if the pair going in the desert is the Lord's son Kantan̲ and His spouse Vaḷḷi. The work is of a moderate quality without the superior diction found in *Ampikāpatikkōvai*. There is little evidence of creative imagination having been at work in the composition.

The genre viewed as a whole

We have traced here the origin of this genre from the *Caṅkam* love literature; it is doubtless that the glorious *Caṅkam* love lyrics which represent the high water mark of achievement in this field must have kindled the desire in the minds of many later poets to work the same themes into their compositions. But a careful, even sympathetic study of *kōvai* works reveals to the intelligent reader the gaping chasm that separates them from *Caṅkam* poetry with the love motif. It is a profitable and interesting exercise to enquire into the reason why there should be such a wide difference in the quality of the two classes of composition on the same theme.

The first major point of difference would seem to be the dexterous, even inspired use of the flora and the fauna and the surroundings and even the season and the time of day or night by the *Caṅkam* lyricists in evoking the appropriate sentiment. This helps them to pack, within the short space of a few lines a powerful emotion- centred experience which gets transferred to the reader with the minimal transit loss. In the *kōvai* works there is little attempt made to harness nature to yield such a bountiful harvest of

precious sentiment. While the *Cankam* poets could compose one piece with a seashore back-ground, the next against a mountain slope and third, on a riverine plain, each piece being quite distinct from any other in the collection, the *kōvai* poet has to compose a whole work of 400 and more stanzas on a particular girl and her lover whose residence is fixed, denying himself the valuable opportunity to sing with a variety of back-grounds.

Indeed this concept of combining all the different modes (tuṟais) of love, making them all happen to the same pair of lovers seems to be the starting point of the whole trouble. *Cankam* poets composed their short lyrics on each emotion-rich love situation as self-contained units. As, however, there is a chronological succession for these episodes, it must have been tempting to combine all of them into a single work; to resist this temptation on the grounds that it is unnatural to combine them, that there are some mutually exclusive situations which it would be ridiculous to group together and that it would be shackling the poet's hands to envisage all these episodes as happening against the same background requires greater literary sensibility and judgment than was available at this period of decay.

A third reason, of course was the extreme regimentation that crystalised each concept in the *kōvai* genre so firmly that there was little scope for the flexibility needed for true poesy to flourish. The modes of love had been too finely divided that often the poet must have been hard put to it to discover something new and interesting to say on them. In fact, for quite a few of these modes in the *kōvai* works there are no examples in the major *Cankam* love anthologies. Grammarians like Nāṟkavirāca Nampi were prone to invent endless categories without giving much thought to their poetic potential. And the four hundred modes of *kōvai* were forged out from the prolific categories minted in the inflationary post-*Cankam* centuries.

A major reason for the superiority of the three major *Caṅkam* love anthologies is that the pieces in them were carefully selected by men of sound discernment from out of thousands floating about in the refined air of the era. If even *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* which was the product, not of a selective process but of nomination of only 5 poets who each composed a hundred verses which were then presumably put together and made into a work is seen to have suffered in literary quality though the poets were respected bards of the era, how could the uncensored, unedited compositions of prolific writers be of a uniformly high quality? And talking of prolificity, Kapilar the most productive of the *Caṅkam* poets wrote much less than 200 short pieces and one slightly longer piece; Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ produced many long works in his lifetime. Overproduction is one of the facets of under-creativity. What was wanting in quality is thought to be made up in numbers. Unfortunately this seldom succeeds in human affairs, least of all in literature.

Some *kōvai* works by non-Hindu poets are noteworthy. A work entitled *Maturaikkōvai* was composed by Kulām Kātir Nāvalar. Two *kōvai* works from Ceykuttampippāvalar of our own century are good examples of this genre though they are strongly coloured by the religious spirit.

Additional shackles were put on themselves by writers like Māṇikkavācakar and Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ who felt impelled to use this essentially secular genre for religious purposes. As Lord Siva could not be made the hero of the love situations he is brought in, in every stanza, often unnaturally but befittingly in a work by a religious savant; and the line or line and a half devoted to Him contributes little to the portrayal of the poetic sentiment. Poyyāmoḻi puts on a different kind of shackle but to the same stifling effect, being compelled, for commercial reasons to praise his patron in every stanza.

The prevailing poetic spirit of the *Caṅkam* era depended on a

subtle suggestion of the sentiment, adequately eked out by an expert use of the background. There was less of the physical and more of the psychological in that poetry. The literary conventions of the era helped the reader to understand the symbolic and suggestive value of these references to the physical and climatic surroundings and thus to derive greater aesthetic delight from the lyrics. The *Caṅkam* conventions had been thrown to the four winds and subtlety gave place to stark overemphasis. In these circumstances, for these lesser poets to retain only the modes of love of the *Cankam* era without the subtleties and nuances and without the conventions of that period and to attempt to sing like the older poets was to try to fly in the air with loads of lead in their packages and with the wings clipped off.

ULĀ

The background

There is an extremely laconic reference to literary descriptions of the processions of gods and royal personages in the *Tolkāppiyam*. The *Muttoḷḷāyiram* contains some fine stanzas which portray the feelings of girls in the city who are all in love with the king, feelings which boil up when he drives in state through the city streets. Two such poems can be enjoyed here:

If I shake off my bashfulness
And stand and gaze upon the Pāṇṭiya king
I shall have lost my feminine graces.
But if I restrain my urge to gaze
The bangles may fall off from my wrists.
I am in a fix: I do not see
How can I drink in the person of the king
Whose wreath fulfils the thirst of the bees:
I do not see where I can find

The surcease of my anguish, the end of my sorrow,
I do not see ....
The second one:
Girls like me who saw the king
Drive in state through the capital city
Have merely lost their complexion
But what we have gained-and isn't that worth
A million times the loss sustained?-
What we have gained is a charming pallor
We who have seen the king drive by. (10)

Everything gets formalised with time, fitted into a steel-frame so rigid that no further growth is possible thereafter. This concept of a lovable king driving in state through the streets of his capital city got formalised into the *Ulā* genre perhaps in the 9th century A.D. and thereafter there have been additions by way of works in strict accord with the formulations but no growth in the structure and overall worth of the genre. The harm attendant on institutionalisation and formalisation of literary models is as great as that, seen in the case of social customs and religious procedures and forms of worship. Such formalisation renders it easier for lesser mortals to feel secure in using the modes but such security is obtained at the cost of flexibility and growth and development.

The first of these works was the *Tirukkayilāya Ñāṉa Ulā* also known as the *Āti Ulā* composed by king Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, the devoted friend of Cuntarar, the celebrated Saiva hymnist. In this, the poet describes how Lord Siva came out on a procession to please the Dēvas. In the 11th century Nāmpiyāṇṭār Nampi composed a work in this genre called *Āḷuṭaippiḷḷaiyār Tiruvulā*. The most famous works in this genre are those composed by *Oṭṭakkūttar*. It has been computed that there are atleast 69 works of the *Ulā* genre in existence.

Ulā works involve glorification of the hero and a description of the splendid procession headed by him (it is always on a hero, never

on a heroine) and actions and the mental state of girls of from 5 to 40 years classified into seven stages, who are in love with him. The works should be in the *Kali Veṇpā* metre; the length has not been regulated. There are rules that lay down that the hero should be a god, a king or an Ācārya, while the first two would seem to fit in a love-dominated genre, it passes the understanding of the present writer how a spiritual preceptor could appropriately be fitted into works of this kind where girls of seven age-brackets are portrayed as hopelessly in love with him. Attempts have been made to show that this is all spiritual love but the reader is left profoundly unconvinced. Clearly the hero should be appropriately a romantic beau to justify all this elaborate romance; an aging spiritual guru looks strangely out of tune in this atmosphere.

Three major Ulā works

Let us take up the three works composed by Oṭṭakkūttar on three Cōḻa kings, called collectively the *Mūvar Ulā*. The first is on Vikkirama Cōḻan; the *Ulā* on him begins with a glorification of the Cōḻa line with a special mention of Kulōttuṅkaṉ-I. Then the poet praises the hero and describes the various stages by which he gets ready for the procession. The caparisoned elephant on which he travels comes in for adulatory description, too. The rest of the work, that is, more than three-fourths of it is devoted to a portrayal of the acts of the infatuated women of the capital town who spare no efforts to put themselves in a position of vantage in order to watch the hero in procession.

In the opening passage where the Cōḻa line is panegyrised, the poet mentions some details which are recorded for the first time; one such is the reference to a Cōḻa king Kiḷḷivaḷavaṉ who travelled to the god of death, Yama in order to argue out a case. Another ancestor is Mantata and a third is Maṉunīti Kaṇṭa Cōḻaṉ. There was a king who frustrated Yama by keeping aged people alive in earthenware jars. All this, of course, sounds purāṇic and must belong to the

territory of prehistory.

In the passage on the caparisoned elephant, the poet says that if there are thunder claps in the sky, the pachyderm gets annoyed at what it considers to be the challenge of a rival and puts out its tusks and its trunk to scan the skies. It calms down only on realising that it was not another tusker trying to challenge its supremacy. What follows is even more of a hyperbole. This elephant, unable to bear the scent of the *must* oozing from the eight (mythical) tuskers which bear the weight of the earth goes round relieving them of their burden, transferring it to the Cōḻa emperor who thus becomes the overlord of the whole world.

Then follow passages describing the followers who form part of the procession. Naturally all the communities of the world known to the poet are described as meekly submissive camp-followers to the Cōḻa ruler. The prostitutes whose bewitching coquetry is duly described anxiously crowd the streets in their eagerness to have a look at the king. Their prosperity is indicated by the many ornaments of high value they display and their real nature is given away by their envenomed glances.

Next to this is placed the description of the mental state and behaviour of very small girls of about 5 years of age. They are so young they never go out unless chaperoned by their mothers. They are being bred with care like young sugarcane by the god of love who had been defeated once in his intentions by Lord Siva; the sugarcane when fully grown will be utilised by the frustrated god as his bow for his future operations against young people. Such a girl first desires the garland of red flowers on the chest of the Cōḻa but is denied that by the mother who points to her the impossibility of making such a request of the mighty king. Then and there, the immature girl falls in love with the king like those more mature in

age and emotional development.

A girl slightly older gets up in the morning reporting that she had a very pleasant dream the previous night relating to a finely blossoming *kōṅkam* tree; her mother embrace her saying that she would secure the Cōḻa king himself as her husband. Just then the drums sound and realising that the king is coming on a procession, she ascends in a hurry to the open terrace upstairs and watches the royal procession, losing her heart to him in her first experience of the grand passion.

An older girl who had already fallen in love with the Cōḻa king and drunk in his majestic features and later painted his portrait and dreamt of him at nights, on hearing now that he is coming in a procession, called for all her best dress and ornaments and unguents and having added allure to her natural beauty stood among other girls of her age, wondering if he would remember having seen her earlier, on account of the material change in her appearance. Even when she was looking on him, the elephant walked past her to a point where he was no longer visible to her. Now she prays ardently for sleeplessness as she does not want these eyes which had drunk his beauty ever to close.

An older girl had played a ball game with the stake stipulating that if she won, her maid (her opponent in the game) will have to obtain the Cōḻa's garland of flowers and give it to her. But today, when the king comes on a procession, she stands speechless, forgetting everything including the trophy of her ball game, lost in the contemplation of the beauty of the king. Now the king passes the point at which she stands and she leans for support on the shoulders of the woman who was standing next to her.

Thus proceeds the description of girls who are selected successively from rising age-brackets. Even the oldest of them selected by

the poet still retains her comeliness; and having quaffed toddy felt sleepy and dreamt that the Cōla had union with her. She begins to recount her experience under the illusion that it was all real and is as if ridiculed by the Cōla appearing in the procession.

The next work of this genre we should consider briefly here is that composed by the same poet on Kulōttuṅka Cōlaṉ, the son of Vikkirama Cōlaṉ. History knows him as Kulōttuṅka II who had a peaceful regime free of wars, a circumstance most unique in those war-torn epochs. The work follows the same pattern as the previous one; the bulk of the work is devoted to a highly sensuous description of the words and acts of girls of various age groups who are powerfully affected by the appearance of Cōla in a procession in the streets of his capital city. But here, the passage describing the king's preparations for the procession is much longer than the corresponding one in the previous *Ulā*. A concept in this part paints the earth looking like the heavens and the heavens looking like the earth; the reason for this exchange of appearance is that the procession raises so much dust that it rises high rendering the heavens very earthy in appearance. So much golden powder is strewn on the streets that the earth takes on the appearance of heaven.

A girl of five years is described here as equivalent to honey that is still immature and has to age in the honeycomb. She is not infatuated like the older girls but stood in the crowd desiring various things the Cōla was having, for herself. For instance, she wanted the pearl necklace on his chest as it looked like a silver brook in which her swan could swim about. She desired to possess the caparisoned elephant so that it might serve as a mountain on which her pet peacock could play. While this differs in details (which are undeniably interesting) from the passages given to the same age group in the first *Ulā* work, the girl desiring things belonging to the king rather than the king himself is the motif common to both. This

points up the weakness of this genre where the scope for being different and innovating and fresh is very limited, indeed.

The third *Ulā* work by the same author is on *Rācarāca Cōlan̠*, son of Kulōttuṅkan̠ II. Clearly he composed this not because he had a lot more conceits to press into service but because, having sung *ulās* on the father and grandfather of the (present) king, he did not want to lose the goodwill of the ruling monarch and so was forced to sing an *Ulā* work on him too. The beauty and abilities of the kings, their fearsome valour, their stature among the royal houses have all been exaggerated to such an extent, they all look alike to the reader, the difference being only in the names by which they are known. The girls of the capital city are also so idealised that one is unable to notice any difference among those of the same age group in the three works; the poet is careful to maintain some differences among the different age groups in the same work, however; otherwise the whole point of the work would have been lost. Oṭṭakkūttar commands an excellent diction and a commendable control over the metre; his capacity for imagination is quite commendable and his sense of detail in portrayal is formidable. A poet of his abilities should have composed an epic poem; it is a pity they were entirely spent in constructing minor literature.

Other Ulā poems

We have a work of this genre on Lord Siva enshrined at Maturai composed by Purāṇat Tirumalainātar who seems to have lived about 450 years ago. The work is entitled *Maturai Cokkanātar Ulā* and is longer than those composed by Oṭṭakkūttar. The peculiarity of this work is that, instead of the hero going out in procession on one occasion and being seen and admired by girls of seven age groups Lord Cokkanātar drives out on seven days during a festival and meets one age-group a day. It is however not clear how only one

age group sees the procession on each day; the question what happened to the others naturally arises. It should, however be said in favour of the author that there is a festival lasting seven days that is celebrated in Maturai.

The poet makes rich use of the many miraculous deeds performed by Lord Siva at Maturai (64 in number as recounted in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟ purāṇam*). It is believed that this *Ulā* dates earlier than the *purāṇam* and that Parañcōti muṉivar took the details of these miracles from the *Ulā*. Besides these local happenings, the poet makes reference to most of the eight famed acts of heroism, performed in eight holy places called *aṭṭavīraṭṭam*. There are also many reverential references made to the Nāyaṉmār.

It is learnt that the poet was commissioned by the brahmins of Citamparam and some hermits of the place to compose a Tamil rendering of the *Citamparapurāṇam* from the Sanskrit version. He fulfilled the commission with such distinction that he began to be called Purāṇat Tirumalainātar. He was a very sincere devotee of Lord Siva and both the works standing to his name today bear testimony to his religious fervour. His poems have a good deal of metric cadence, verbal effects and puns; he seems to revel in the use of figures of speech, simile being his forte. The Lord's chest is compared to the Meru mountain and the effulgent necklace of pearls, He was wearing, is described as looking like the orb of the sun just risen. This is one of the more popular of the works in this genre; the poet has worked in as many features of distinction as he could in this highly stylised genre.

There is another *Ulā* on Lord Siva by Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ which enjoys a certain degree of popularity on account of the prestige of the author. The *Ñāṉa Ulā* of Vēlanāyakam Cāstiriyār is a well-known work in this genre.

One would feel that an *Ulā* work should be light and playful, as warranted by its central theme. The whole town wears a festive

look and people's minds are filled with a sense of gaiety when the Lord or the king comes out in procession. The light touch is visible only in Oṭṭakkūttar's works. In the case of the two others and the third well-known work of the same genre, the *Tiruvārūr Ulā* by Antakak Kavi Virārākava Mutaliyār, there are two circumstances which conspire to make them heavy reading. One is that they are all intensely religious works; the second is that the hero in all the three is Lord Siva who does not inspire gaiety and frivolity. A third factor, of course, is the calibre of the poets themselves. This light and even frivolous genre with a certain amount of fun-potential has turned out to be a heavy propaganda material in the hands of religious writers who, admittedly, did possess several distinctions. They would have been well advised to have selected some other genre as the vehicle of their fervour, and not the *Ulā* with its light air and the very serious limitations referred to earlier that are inherent in it.

TŪTU

Origin and development

Men and women have found a need to communicate with each other directly and if distance separates them, through the medium of a messenger. Royalty had formalized the institution of messengers communicating intentions of war and peace. Lovers, in their distraction send anything that can move (and in later centuries even things like tobacco which cannot move on their own) as messengers to each other. In *Caṅkam* literature Avvaiyār goes as a messenger between two kings at war and makes peace between them (*Puṟam* 95). Picirāntaiyār sends a swan as his messenger declaring his undying devotion to king Kōpperuñ Cōḻaṉ (*Puṟam* 67).

But the poem that seems to have served as a model to the later poets is *Akanāṉūṟu* 170, where the heroine considers and rejects the claims of other things around her, like the bower, the backwaters and the *puṉṉai* tree for the role of messenger and elects a crab for the post, outlining her anguish; in this moving poem the girl points

out how in the days gone by she had braved all the obstacles and the risks attendant and met him at midnight to fulfil his longing and wonders now if she will ever be able to swim home across the sea of grief caused by the loneliness which separation brings in its wake. This poem has all the main ingredients of a *tūtu* piece which got formalised later.

The *Muttoḷḷāyiram* which serves as an excellent bridge between the hoary lyrics of the *Caṅkam* age and the literature of later days, has a very good example of *a tūtu* piece which is worth reproducing here.

Youthful crane with crimson legs!
If you are headed for Uṟaiyūr city
I beseech you with both my hands
In supplication on your legs.
When you reach your distinction
Where on the Kāviri the fat fish climb
And slip and climb the river bank
In constant play, I beseech you
To see the king and report to him
The fell disease I suffer from,
On his account all the time -
Youthful crane, will you do this for me? (11)

These early models were taken up by the hymnists both Saiva and Vaiṇava and beautiful pieces were composed sending usually birds to God, the hymnists themselves being the girls in love with Him. Campantar sends a parrot and Cuntarar deputes both parrots and the *pūvai* birds as their messengers. 'Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār' starts a decade by fitting out birds as messengers but stops at a point as even this step may have caused pain to the delicately-nurtured lady love he turns out to be in his love poems. Nammāḻvār uses the ten stanzas in a decade to commission ten birds and bees to carry his urgent message to the lord.

Many poets began to write separate short poems on the message theme and then grammarians stepped in regulating the metre (which should be *Kalivenpā*) and the classes of living and non-living things that could be sent out as messengers (which are confined to a list of ten-the swan, the peacock, the parrot, the *pūvai* (a kind of bird), the cuckoo, the bee, the maid, the cloud, the heart and the southern breeze). The general structure of a message poem also got fixed; it was stipulated that the work should begin with the love-lorn lady's reasons for selecting the particular bird or thing as her messenger and for rejecting the others; then her own pitiable plight is explained in detail and in most cases the messenger is requested to communicate all this without loss of impact and bring back his reaction symbolised by the garland he is wearing. There are some cosmetic changes made in this general outline; one work, the *Viralivitu tūtu* departs from the otherwise universal trend by making the lover send a messenger to his lady love. Many poets naturally rebelled against the hamstringing list of permissible messengers which was pointless and started using the deer, money, perfumes, the Tamil language and even tobacco as messengers in their poems. The genre started as one presenting love but was gleefully seized upon by religious poets who used it to express religious sentiments. Atleast 60 poems belonging to this genre are known.

The Tamilviṭutūtu

Let us examine in some detail the best of the *tūtu* works, the *Tamilviṭutūtu*, a short work of 268 couplets whose authorship is unknown. The Tamil language itself is deputed as her messenger of love to Lord Cokkanātar of Maturai by a girl deeply in love with Him. Though Tamil has not been included in the list of eligible messengers, the wisdom of selecting it over all the others will be obvious to anyone who studies the work. For, all the achievements of Tamil poets have been covered by this poet and since they are no mean a catalogue, the work has been enriched by these many references, a

tenth of which, in size or quality could not be made about parrots or the cloud or the bee.

After the customary prayer verses, the poet envisages Tamil as king and goes into details describing the many facets of a language and its literature as the many decorative and utilitarian features of the royal court. The nine sentiments evocable through literature are the nine princes and works in Sanskrit become its relatives; the Vedakamas constitute the palace priest, epic poems are the friends of the king and the *purāṇams* the royal army. Then, in a long passage the more notable poetical works in Tamil are listed with total indifference to chronology and quality as the members of the king's body-guard corps.

Then, in a fine passage, Tamil is described as the very fruit of emancipation, cultivated carefully by 'ploughmen poets' who use the word as their plough, the metre as the bund delimiting the fields; uneducated polemicians constitute the weeds which must be plucked away. The whole metaphor has been beautifully sustained and this constitute one of the most poetic passages in the entire work. Tamil is envisaged as the fruit of these labours that ensures final emancipation from the cycle of births and deaths; this concept confirms the suspicion raised earlier at the point where he placed *Tēvāram* ahead of *Caṅkam* works and the five epic poems that the poet is a staunch Saiva whose religious fervour outruns his literary zeal.

After addressing Tamil in this elaborate manner, the love-lorn lady makes an all-too-brief statement that she has something very important to say to it in supplication and in a long passage lauds the many qualities and achievements of Tamil and the way men and gods regard it. The list of qualities is in some place intelligently conceived but in others it is marred by mere technical enumeration made without a sense of proportion. For instance, the three gods forming the Hindu Trinity possess only three *kuṇas (sattuvam, racas*

and *tamas)* while Tamil has ten (the ten *kuṇas* as listed by the Sanskrit rhetoricians and adopted in the later-day Tamil). Food has only six tastes while Tamil has nine (sentiments). The people of the world can have only eight 'seers' (items of prosperity) while Tamil has thirty (referring to the measured syllables in prosody).

In another effort at sophistry, the poet points out some aspects which are inapt, with reference to Tamil. As this passage is rich in puns which have significance only in Tamil they cannot all be explained here. Some examples can however be given; Tamil, on account of its perfection is called *Centamiḻ* but it is sung in *Veṇpā* metre; the *cen-* part of it meaning also red in colour and *veṇ* meaning white. Tamil has flourished in all the yukas but is sung in *Kalippā.* It possesses all the ten appropriate qualities but its metres are called *Viruttams;* as Tamil does not have the Sanskrit dh, the word *viruttam* meaning inappropriate is also written as *viruttam.*

In material wealth, Tamil is quite rich indeed as it has *Cintāmaṇi* and *Maṇimēkalai* and quite a rich array of *alaṅkāras* (meaning jewels). Even the gods have great affection for Tamil as is evidenced by Lord Siva sitting with the *TamiḻcCaṅkam*, Lord Tirumal going behind a poet and Lord Murukaṉ teaching it to Akattiyar. The lady then refers to Cuntarar sending Lord Siva Himself as his messenger to Paravai, his wife and says, "You sent the Lord as a messenger; now I am in such a plight that I am forced to send you as my messenger."

She then lists a number of acts done by Tamil poets to favour women like being a preceptor to the Pāṇṭiya Queen Maṅkaiyarkkaraci and being a foster-father to the girls Ciṅkaṭi and Vaṉappakai and says Tamil is always compassionate to women and it should now heal the wounds in her heart.

She then analyses the qualifications and shortcomings of the other candidates for the post and dismisses all of them as unsuit-

able. The swan may be good for other things but it has a record of failure in discovering the Lord, when Brahma took the form of a swan and tried to reach the head of the Lord, as a challenge and failed in the attempt. A deer can run very fast and may do as a messenger, only it may be terrified at the tiger skin worn by the Lord around His waist. Thus the rivals are all eliminated and the sole candidate remaining in the field is elected as her messenger.

Then, in an interesting passage where the poet draws his material largely from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, the many stories connecting Lord Cokkanātar of Maturai with Tamil are remembered, like the one where He helps a poor Tarumi to obtain a bundle of gold coins by composing for him a Tamil poem. These stories help to establish the fact that the messenger is certain to be well received by Him.

Then follows a long passage where the glories of the Lord are recapitulated; here too the stories from *purāṇams* like the *Periyapurāṇam* are referred to and an interesting array of articles presented to Him by his devotees is listed. The array includes the sandal paste anointed on Him by Mūrttināyaṉār and the dish made of his own son's flesh by Ciṟuttoṇṭar, as well as the bath given by Kaṇṇappanāyaṉār who spat a mouthful of water over the *liṅkam* on the hill in a gesture of ceremonial bathing.

The girl then makes a passionate declaration that she subsists only on Tamil; She has no desire for even the nectar of the gods. she then lists the many miraculous deeds performed by the three great saints who, in her eyes personify Tamil; when Tamil can accomplish such wonderful miracles, is it difficult, she demands to know, for Tamil to rescue her from her plight. They and other saints like Kāraikkāl ammaiyār have ascended to the highest heaven only through the agency of Tamil; surely it should be able to help a girl in her moment of dire distress.

She then narrates how great poets who composed poems in Tamil have been able to travel great distances, over hot, barren deserts, sometimes with active help from the Lord Himself who brought one of them packed food to eat. So, she says persuasively, for Tamil to travel to Maturai to see the Lord and narrate to Him her troubles will not prove a difficult task.

Then follows detailed instructions for Tamil about how to enter the Lord's temple and finally reach the sanctum sanctorum after observing all the prescribed rules on the subject. The Lord's features and limbs are then described, each being associated with a deed of compassion for a devotee or of valour against an enemy of devotees. Then Tamil should commence conveying the message after chastising Him for his neglect of her; He had sold bangles to women in one of the playful miracles He performed in Maturai; how then can He appropriate her bangles, with what justification can a purveyor turn out to be a depriver ! She concludes her long monologue with a tribute to Tamil whose descriptive and persuasive powers are well known and with an expression of confidence that, appealed to in this manner by the eloquent messenger, the Lord cannot fail to respond to the request of the suffering girl to come bringing succour to her.

The merits of the work

The poet, the author of the *Tamiḻviṭutūtu* has several obvious qualifications. The first in importance among them is his great love of the Tamil language in which he must have attained great proficiency. His judgement in selecting Tamil language itself as the messenger is most happy. The great achievements of Tamil poets have been referred to most appropriately in the correct places, making them the achievements of the language itself, personified. Thus, the miracles performed by the great hymnists are harnessed to good

purpose is demonstrating the power of Tamil or its compassion for women or the Lord's great affection for it. Thus the entire field of Tamil literature has served as the armoury for the poet who could draw at will from its prolific contents. If a parrot or a bee or a cloud is chosen as the messenger, there could not have been a tenth of the resources which Tamil has with which to embellish the poem. The selective judgement of the poet and his great love of the language must be put down as the most important factors making for the popularity of the poem.

A second merit of the poet, much lauded by pundits but one that repels the modern reader is his ability to use the double entendre. This figure has been harnessed in many places connecting up the qualities of a messenger or the pomp and pageantry of a medieval royal court. The poet has an excellent command over the assonance natural to the language which he puts to excellent use to generate rhyme *(etukai)* at the beginning of the lines. The assonance which appears forced in many poems strikes the reader as natural and uncontrived in this poem, making the sound effect pleasing.

The poet seems to be more interested in religion than in literature. He is a dedicated Saiva and has a great reverence for the Saiva hymnists from whose works he draws abundantly. Perhaps Lord Cokkanātar of Maturai has been chosen as the recipient of the message, because the poet could make rich use of the sixty- four sports of the Lord performed in Maturai. There is certainly no harm in all these. But the lover of great literary works like the *Caṅkam* anthologies and the *Kamparāmāyaṇam* is bound to feel disappointed at the poor use the poet has made of the immortal verses in them- verses far superior to any that the hymnists could produce. Maturai, the theatre, where Lord Siva performed His sports appeals to him profoundly; but Maturai, the headquarters of the *Tamiḻccaṅkam* has little attraction for Him. If such were the preferences of a cultured creative poet of a recent epoch one need not seek far to find

the reasons for the virtual disappearance of the *Cankam* works from the Tamil land.

Other works in the genre

We may next consider briefly another message poem that enjoys a certain measure of popularity, the *Vaṇṭuviṭutūtu* where a love-lorn lady deputes a bee as her messenger of love to one of the deities in Kāñci called Āṉantaruttirēcar, an aspect of Lord Siva. The poet is Kacciyappa Muṉivar not to be confused with Kacciyappa Civācāriyar, the famous author of *Kantapurāṇam*. This poet has authored some *purāṇams* of which we have already considered the *Vināyaka purāṇam*. All his works are dominated by the religious motif and admirers have compared his poetry with that of the *Cankam* age.

After the customary prayer where the *Saiva Siddhanta* motif predominates, the poet describes the city of Kāñci in a long passage which is redolent with numbers presented in the ascending order. The poet is so much taken up with the many splendours of his native city that he devotes a lot of couplets to a description of the many other temples situated in it and the glory of the deity Āṉantaruttirēcar decked in all finery at festival time. The significance of the holy ash and of many other signs of Saivism come in for the warmest praise.

The girl sees Him coming in a procession during this festival and falls headlong in love with him. This part of it reads like an *Ulā* work. After the procession passes her, she feels the separation from Him keenly. Being sure that if the compassionate deity knows her anguish He is certain to rush to her side, she decides to send a messenger to Him.

Then ensues the customary discussion of the merits and demerits of the limited number of candidates for the post of a messenger. The heart is dismissed as, in the first place, it has not returned yet to

the owner from a sally along with the Lord in procession; and if it returns, it may forget its mission if sent as a messenger, in the preoccupation of contemplating the Lord's glory. The maids, if deputed may at best express before Him the girl's love for Him but will not be able to point exactly to the garland of *konṟai* blossoms on his chest which she wants badly to possess. The bee with its highly developed sense for flowers can fly directly to the specific garland and perch on it, ignoring the others. The girl then praises the bee for its many qualities and expresses her determination to send it to the Lord as her messenger of love.

For she is now sure that if the bee goes forth to His presence and imbibes the honey in the *konṟai* flowers and begins to hum, He is certain to listen. And He would either send the garland to her, or feeling she may not survive the long delay, He may personally speed to her in order to comfort her. As the humming of the bee becomes an important device to arouse the Lord's sympathy, the girl devotes a certain amount of time to the notes and the method of humming that would secure the best results. Critics find that the poet has displayed his minute knowledge of musicology in this long passage.

But the heart of the poet is clearly on religion and hereabouts he composes the best couplets in the whole work to describe the bliss-filled appearance of the Lord which promotes bliss in the devotee's heart. The work ends with a pointed request for the girl to the bee to bring to her the *konṟai* garland worn by the Lord and pave the way for her lasting bliss.

The author is a dexterous versifier and carries a mastery not only of Tamil secular and religious literature but of *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophy also. He seems to have earned the name of '*kavirākcaca*', who as an ordained ascetic of the Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai mutt reigned as a poet of considerable renown in his times. His choice of a bee is to be commended only on the grounds that for the mission entrusted to the messenger of bringing back the Lord's garland of

konrai flowers, a bee suits better than the others on account of its instinct for blooms. An admirer has even composed a *tūtu* poem on Kacciyappa Munivar entitled *Neñcuviṭu tūtu*. He commands a good deal of admiration from Saivas of a strong religious bent.

Having dealt with *tūtu* works with a religious motif, we may now turn to one which is purely secular, the *Viralioviṭututūtu*, a work done to panegyrise Nākama Kūḷappa Nāyakkan by Cuppiratīpakkavirāyar. The patron was a chieftain who ruled over a part of the Maturai district. The poet has composed another work on his patron called *Kūḷappa Nāyakkan kātal*. The famous scholar-poet Palapaṭṭaṭaic Cokkanātap Pulavar, a contemporary of the poet gave him a striking tribute on his death for his talent in turning nice phrases. The poet belonged to the 18th century.

The story of the work can be briefly told here. The hero, a Vaiṇava well-educated, marries a suitable girl and begins to lead the respectable life of a householder with her. But the coquettish charms of a prostitute in the neighbouring city ensnare him so totally his wife upbraids him in the severest terms and he feels forced to leave the house to wander over the land; during his wanderings his roving eye sees a famed prostitute of Maturai and he becomes a slave to her charms. But when he comes to the end of his financial resources, the commercially-minded call girl drives him out.

The poor man decides to go to Kūlappa Nāyakkan and win a largess by displaying his talents at "*avatānam*" a feat of memory much practised in the past. His expectations are over-fulfilled as the famed potentate showers wealth on him. The hero starts for home but wisely sends a songstress (*virali*) as his messenger to the wronged wife less to convey news of his home-coming and more by way of mollification.

The work is criticised by some on account of the rather open manner in which illicit love gets described. But it is undeniable that

the poet commands a pleasant style of writing and the verses flow like running water. His description of the second prostitute (the one at Maturai) is interesting and innovative with a puckish impudence which is engaging. Her beauty is such that ascetics on seeing her began to feel sorry they had chosen their career wrongly. The lecherous hero who is a brahmin versed in the Vedas is asked a very relevant question by the elders:

Your mouth utters the vedas.
How could you receive
The juice of pan leaves spat
By a girl of easy virtue
Into that sanctified mouth? (12)

After recounting in detail all his misdeeds to the songstress, the hero requests her to go to his youthful wife after a bout of lute playing to soften her, to plead his cause before her and ask for her forgivance with assurances of spotless behaviour on his part in the future. The poet has added a request at this stage, with a good psychological insight, from the over-sexed hero for a deeply satisfying requital from his wife, and the pleasant poem of love comes to an end rightly on this note.

Among the unusual things selected for the role of messenger is money; and this messenger is so popular with poets, as many a five *tūtu* poems have been composed centering on money. The best-loved among them all is undoubtedly that composed by Palapaṭṭaṭai Cokkanāta Kavirāyar, the contemporary of Cuppiratīpak Kavirāyar whom he admired and on whose death he composed a laudatory poem. This poet composed many works of merit among which is another *tūtu* work with a parrot as the messenger carrying a message of love to Lord Tirumal of Tirumāliruñcōlai entitled *Aḻakar kiḷḷai viṭu tūtu*. The *paṇaviṭutūtu* we are about to discuss must have been composed in the early years of the 18th century; its objective seems to be to panegyrise Muttu Vicaya Rakunāta Cētupati, the king o

Rāmanātapuram, the poet's royal patron.

A peculiarity of the poem (apart from the unusual nature of the messenger selected) consists in the fact that neither the girl nor the boy in love sends the message. It is the maid of the girl in love that sends the message on her behalf. And the argument that settles the choice of this unusual messenger is that everyone welcomes money, all gates are opened at its magic pass-word. Indeed the qualities of money are described in 231 couplets forming the major portion of the poem; the king is described in 130 couplets while the message itself occupies only eight.

The work contains a number of passages that are clearly intended as social criticism through parody and sarcasm, two powerful weapons in the hands of a dexterous poet. It raises money to a level higher than that occupied by the Hindu Trinity. It paints money as a living being with high-placed relations and possessing even royal characteristics. The gimmicks played by doctors, wizards, poetasters, alchemists and prostitutes in order to win money by all questionable methods are described in interesting passages which incidentally indicate how the world has always been unethical in its methods. Money is like a sweet-tasting poison which is imbibed by all avaricious people only to be tormented by the venom that they have taken. Money goes everywhere, no gates can close against it; it takes many shapes and forms to entice the hearts of men.

The poem has an unusual flavour and is interesting for its sarcastic flaying of the foibles of man. The author seems to have suffered at the hands of avaricious, deceitful men and he delights in pillorying them. He commands a facile, racy style and a total control over the metre prescribed for this genre. The work can be commended as enjoyable reading with a message that is very clearly seen; it is not often that we come across a work of this quality in the type-cast works of minor *pirapantams*.

There are over 60 works composed in the *tūtu* genre that are available today. Many of them are frankly religious poems; some are panegyrics where the potentate may be made the hero or may get laudatory references made about him incidentally. A few works were composed to deride a foe; instances of this type are the "*kaḻutai viṭu tūtu*" and the "*kukkal viṭu tūtu*" where the ass and the dog figure as the chosen messengers. An overall estimate can be made about works in this genre that they are less hide-bound, routine and cast-in-a-type than those in other genres like the *Ulā*, for instance.

ANTĀTI

This is a genre with a most mechanical basic quality acting as the common characteristic of all its members. The stanzas in this begin with the last part of the last line of the previous stanza an obviously advantageous arrangement when chanting the poem, with the last part of every stanza acting as a reminder for the recall of the next. With this kind of mechanical basis with no rules controlling the contents, it is natural that works of very different types and flavour came to be written in this genre. As the *antāti* structure helps in the recall of the stanzas, this genre abounds in works of religious value, *tūti* as they are called, enabling the pious to chant them in temples or as part of the prayer at home. This is the most prolific genre among all the many kinds that go under the generic name, minor *pirapantams*; there are 250 works coming under this that are known.

The three Vaiṇava antātis

The three *antātis* composed by the First Āḻvārs and Kāraikkāl ammaiyār's *Aṟputat tiruvantāti* can rank as the first distinct works of this kind, even though the *antāti* structure is noticed here and there in *Caṅkam* literature. The first of the First Āḻvārs, Poykai sings rapturously of the Lord's advent in Kamcā's jail:

To shatter chains of parents jailed
Kiruṭṭiṇā came to protect all
And angel multitudes
Bathe your toes with flower dew.

His power and valour are celeberated in:

His arms have served
To lift a mount and tear a steed:
To tear the tusks of furied elephant
And hold aloft the horn triumphed. (13)

In a stanza, pithy and beautiful, the natural proclivity of man to seek God is portrayed with three telling metaphors, perhaps the best in the three hundreds.

The rivers flow into the sea;
The lotus flowers at touch of sun:
The soul reaches Death's grim Kingdom
But godly consciousness reaches only Him. (14)

The second, Pūtattāḻvār starts with a lamp lit out of his own personal resources like love and enthusiasm for God as the vessel and the ghee with the mind as the wick:

Love as vessel, urge as ghee,
Passioned mind as wick
I light the Lamp of soul
For Lord Nārāyaṇa as Glow of coal. (15)

The stirring story of God rushing to the succour of Kacēntiraṉ, the elephant-devotee is told in a stanza:

Sunk deep in depths of pond,
The elephant-devotee, caught by crocodile
Screamed and offered flowers to god
And gained His Grace, quickly relieved . (16)

The loving mind of the Āḻvār distressed at the many sacrifices He had to make in the course of His in carnations just to help and succour His devotees comes out with a stanza full of rhetorical questions:

Is it fair that Lord should lie
On blades of grass, instead of python couch?
Be charioteer to Arccun Valiant
And run in vain to catch miraged deer? (17)

The third in the group, Pēyāḻvār indicates in a stanza how the Lord is many healing things to him when beset by the many-faced evil of life on earth:

He to me a healing care,
He to me in pleasing wear,
He to me is honeyed sweet,
His juicy Feet my sole Retreat. (850) (18)

His greatness is beyond the powers of even such a gifted singer as Pēyāḻvār to extol. A stanza notices this honorable failure of the poet:

I grope for words to verse His sheen,
I sing in fractured lisping frail:
I wait for aeons unperturbed
To gain the win of mercied Grace. (829) (19)

There is a beautiful concept in Vaiṣṇavism that though God is everywhere and His favoured abodes are the heaven (Vaikuṇṭam), the sea and the holy places like Tiruppati, God loves best to repose in the hearts of his devotees. Perhaps Pēyāḻvār was the first to give formal expression to this to be followed later by Nammāḻvār and others. Here is the stanza:

Heaven is His home: The sea his couch;
Tirumalai hills His holy sport:
But I believe my heart alone
Is His passioned Abode. (907) (20)

Kāraikkāl ammaiyār's antāti work

We have seen in brief Kāraikkāl ammaiyār's life and the message conveyed in her three *pirapantams*. Here we shall see a few verses from out of the 101 composed in the *antāti* form under the title *Tiruvaṟputat tiruvantāti*. She claims in the first verse itself that love for Lord Siva burgeoned in her heart from the time she began to study the language. Just like the Āḻvārs she says, "People assert that the heavens are His abodes, that the capital city of Indira is where He lives. But I know that His most favoured residence is my own heart!"

Ammaiyār was bewitchingly handsome and as a consequence had to face difficulties in the shape of lascivious youths developing romantic notions connecting her; she prayed to God to give her the form of a ghost so that these difficulties would disappear; but much more importantly, she could then rightfully belong to the class of close attendants on the lord. She gets this desire fulfilled and is rapturous about it; this is the way she expresses her mental state:

I have got this privileged form
I care nothing if I acquire
Or fail to obtain aught else in life.
For now I am one among the group
Of devoted ghouls that serve the Lord
Who sports a third eye upon His forehead! (86) (21)

Ammaiyār longs for a vision of His dance of universal destruction and sings dolefully of her sense of frustration:

This is the longing that has been nursed all my living days
This longing never shall fade away; it has to get fulfilled.
I long to see His dancing form with sweeping golden hair
That brings to the mind a stately palm with its foliage, dry, alight,
The Lord with a ball of raging fire held in His swaying hand
I long to see Him swirling round in the darkest hour of the night
(22)

She is granted this vision by the compassionate Lord who directs her to go over to Tiruvālaṅkāṭu where, in the burning ghat He shall stage His dance of universal destruction. She witnesses the dance in her ghoul's form and her ecstasy is registered in the other *pirapantam* the *Mūttatiruppatikam* to which reference has been made. But in the *Tiruvantāti* she expresses her deep concern about the fate of the worlds which might crumble to dust on the impact of this awesome dance. In her deep compassion for the beings that occupy these worlds, she expresses a note of warning to the Lord who is dancing with the total abandon of an artiste.

If, O Lord, your dancing foot
Slips, the lower world shall crumble.
If your head is thrust too far
The heavens shall break into smithereens.
If your bangled, weaving hands
Are not restrained, the four directions
Shall shatter to dust. So dance, O Lord,
With due restraint! The universe
That forms your stage is too fragile! (77) (23)

Ammaiyār commands great respect among Saiva devotees; her poetry is simple but very poetical and her total dedication to the Lord is manifest in it. She is very much at home in the metres and carries a mastery of Tamil diction. Good literature should pass the test of being interesting to read; Ammaiyār's three *pirapantams* make very interesting reading and therefore constitute good literature.

Poṉvaṇṇattu antāti

An *antāti* work that commands considerable respect from Saiva enthusiasts is the *Poṉvaṇṇattu antāti* by Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, the bosom friend of Cuntaramūrtti Nāyaṉār. There are no references to his having been a ruling prince in this poem; he does not provide data about himself in his hymns as Campantar and Cuntarar do. He shows himself to be an ardent devotee who longs only for the mental state where he never forgets the Lord, be he born as a king, an ordinary mortal or as a creature lower down the scale.

The royal devotee has a positive horror of the sense-dominated worldly life; he records the results of his mental renunciation of the pulls and attractions of the five senses in a poem where he states exultantly that all his agitated activity has ceased and his mind has attained a clarity never before enjoyed by it and he has been able to reach the sacred feet of the three-eyed Lord, the highest destiny to which man can aspire.

There is a work called *Tirukkaruvaippatiṟṟup pattu antāti* composed by (Varakuṇarāma Pāṇṭiyaṉ). Karuvai is the dimunitive name for the holy place Karivalamvantanallūr in the south Pāṇṭiya country. A feature of this work is that, not one, but ten metres are employed in it. The appeal of this work is very emotional and devotees revere it by calling it '*kuṭṭit tiruvācakam*'.

Other antātis

Piḷḷaip Perumāḷ Ayyaṅkār has already been referred to in this work. He has authored an *antāti* work called *Aḻākar antāti* on the deity enshrined at Tirumāliruñ cōlai near Maturai. In it the scholar-poet displays all the verbal tricks of which he is a master; but the work is also remarkable for its passionate appeal to the Lord to save him from all evil.

In some of the stanzas the poet praises the feet of the Lord which have notched up a number of fantastic deeds that are beyond the ability of mere mortals-like measuring the three worlds, and dancing on the head of the dreaded serpent; but such a great one could lower himself to the level of acting as a messenger on behalf of his devotees, the Pāṇṭavas. In another stanza, the poet puts himself in the mental state of a love-lorn maiden and sends the cloud as her messenger to Aḻakar to convey to him the extent of the love she bears to Him.and obtain His reply and response. In this manner he introduces variety and reader interest into a devotional poem unlike many others who neglect these important dimensions of a literary work.

Perhaps the greatest work in this genre is the *antāti* on Apirāmi., the deity enshrined in Tirukkaṭavūr in the Cōḻa region. The work was composed by Apirāmi paṭṭar whose life was so totally devoted to a contemplation and non-traditional worship of the Mother Goddess that almost nothing of factual importance is known about his life. There are legendary accounts about him however and one of them shows how the world did not regard him on account of his total detachment and how the visit of King Sarfoji of Tañcāvūr became the occasion for the staging of a miracle by the Goddess which proved to everyone that the devotee was very dear to Her heart. A few other

works of religious value are ascribed to him; but he has carved for himself a permanent place in the annals of Tamil poesy through this single work.

Islamic and Christian Pirapantams

As Muslim and Christian poets started composing religious works during the heyday of the minor *pirapantams*, they adopted eagerly the genres of this branch of literature as media for their works. Sheikh Aptul Kāter Nayiṉār Leppai, a master of many languages composed a *kalampakam* on Mecca and an *antāti*. Piccai Iprahim Pulavar wrote as many as fourteen religious works in these genres.

Pīr Mukammatu Appā was a sufi of the 17th century; he wrote in the mystic vein popularised by the Cittars. His *Kuṟavañci* and *Kuṟam* works on Islam are well-known.

Apart from composing Islamic works in the well-known forms in use in the Tamil land, Muslim poets devised and used new forms of *pirapantams* like the 'kissa' (teaching presented in story form); 'the masala' and the 'namah' (historical narrative on the lines of Shah namah and Akpar namah.)

Among the Christian poets, Vīramā muṉivar, the famous author of *Tēmpāvaṇi* also composed some works in the *kalampakam* and *ammāṉai* genres. Munsiff Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai has given to Tamil two *antātis* and a *Patikam* on Christian themes. Like many of the Muslim poets, Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai has a spirit of wide tolerance and his works reflect this. Vētanāyaka Cāttiriyār wrote a number of works in popular *pirapantam* forms. He *Petlēkam Kuṟavañci* is the best known among his works . He has composed a *Ñāṉa Ulā*, devising a structure completely different from the traditional. He has also written a *Ñāṉak Kummi* and a *Ñāṉa eṟṟappāṭṭu* and an *ūñcal* work on Christian themes.

Chapter Eight
MODERN TAMIL LITERATURE
Poetry

The Pārati (Bharati) revolution

Modern literature in Tamil begins with the advent of Makakavi Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati. There may be several likely dates from which modern literature can be considered to start in the case of other societies. 'Modern' is after all a very relative word having relevance only to the time the word is used; *Caṅkam* literature was quite modern to Kapilar and Avvaiyār. And normally little that is of external significance happens at the start of an era to herald its launching. No horns or conchs are blown, no band is played, no proclamations are made to harbinger the beginning of a literary era. Usually these eras are noticed and classified and dates assigned to them long after they are over, by critics and historians of literature.

But in the case of Tamil it was as if drums were beaten and horns blown when Pārati started writing. For, with the sureness of touch of a man of genius, he put an end to the long period of mediocrity, of type-cast works with little life or originality in them and ushered in an era rightly named after him. Some may feel that Pārati's main contribution was in the field of poetry and others like Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai and Va.Ve. Cu. Aiyar should be given the credit for pioneering the novel and the short story. This is partly true and Pārati had little to contribute specifically to the launching of these genres.

But in the truest and purest sense of the word Pārati was the pioneer of the modern era; for it was he who fired the first shots of revolt against mental hegemony and literary serfdom, against a

deadening conservatism in mental habits and literary mores. Once the standard of revolt had been raised by the defiant and steady hands of Pārati, it was comparatively easier for new genres to be launched; the miasma had been cleared and the air had taken on a tonic quality that inspired an innovative spirit. Before his advent, the innovator may have been considered an iconoclast and pilloried by society. Pārati had made innovation and iconoclasm fashionable.

Let us analyse the means by which Pārati achieved this metamorphosis. The most important of them all was his uncompromising love of freedom;he hated with all the force of his generously endowed personality, all slavish tendencies to conform to outmoded mores be they social, religious or literary, to a mindless conservatism, to a timid and diffident cleaving to the dead past. And with the force of his personality to whcih we have referred and with his reputation of total disregard for his own selfish interests and his alluring poetry, he was able to propagate these qualities of fearlessness, a passion to experiment and to innovate and a readiness to throw overboard all dead practices, customs and mores, among his countrymen with amazing speed. In a matter of two decades, men's minds had changed radically in an old society, very averse to change.

This radical change affected the genres in which poets composed; the old genres were given up (not totally but the focus of attention had clearly shifted from them) and new forms, simpler, less regimented began to get launched. The diction became much simpler as also the metres. In fact, in place of the highly organised metres of old, new popular metres came to be preferred. Shorter poems became the order of the day; Pārati's long poems like *Pāñcāli Capatam* are quite short in comparison with the long works of the eras gone by. Most poems could be read at one sitting.

A second major change was that Pārati put into poetic focus the common man, the humble worker in Sri Lanka's tea gardens or in the canefields of Fiji. Gone was the custom to write panegyrical

pieces on kings and rich patrons. Perhaps, even if Pārati had not happened on the scene, this change might have crept into the literary scene of the Tamil land by slow degrees with the winds of democracy blowing from the rest of the world. But Pārati ushered in the change with his characteristic quickness. If a measure of the role played by Pārati in effecting this is needed, a comparison can be instituted between the Tamil works of Pārati's era and that immediately following his untimely death on the one hand and the works produced in the other Indian languages on the other hand. It would be seen that in the latter, poets were mostly persevering with the genres of the past and their works were bardic in approach and emphasis till the time of Indian independence. The glorious exception to this general rule was, of course, *Bengali* where the pace was set by another man of genius, Rabindranath Tagore, who matched Pārati in calibre though perhaps not in fire-power.

A third quality change, perhaps a natural consequence of the second was Pārati's urgent advocacy of revolutionary changes in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. His passionate championing of the cause of the political, economic and social underdog would appear very familiar to our ears since we have got used to it in the last five to six decades; but how diametrically different it was from the spirit of the poetry of the age just preceding his advent could be realised by a student who compares the literary products of the two ages. As part of his social reform programme, he decried caste and all the inequalities which it breeds; he held aloft the flag of revolt of women who were subject to the most horrible abuse by the decadent society.

Pārati was certainly helped by the changes that were taking place in the country. The British imperial regime had unwittingly, perhaps, thrown open the windows to the gusts of western winds by compelling their subjects to learn English. Newspapers and maga-

zines in the rulers' language were started and the news of the world began to percolate even to the villages. The railways opened up the country and ships made it possible for the richer classes to travel outside the country. Indians took to education with avidity; at no other time before had so many of the supposed lower classes been allowed to sip from the inebriating fountain of languages and arts and sciences, for education had always been confined to the elite in the earlier epochs.

This democratisation of education rendered it necessary that poets of the new age speak in a less exalted diction and speak on subjects of greater immediacy to the people at large. The easier means of communication and the spread of education rendered class distinctions largely meaningless. The enticing message of the Russian revolution and the stirring story of the earlier revolution in France were eagerly grasped by the people in whom the first dreams of social equality and political independence were evoked. In fact Pārati himself sang ecstatically of the revolution in Russia in a manner that reminds the reader of the fervour ignited in the minds of poets like Shelley and Byron by the French revolution. The hour finds the man; the hour was just right for radical concepts and the man was found in the prodigiously gifted radical, Pārati, to exploit the potentialities of the hour.

Pārati's works-a brief survey

Despite the constant harping of critics on the virtues of the longer songs, the present writer feels that the real Pārati lives in the shorter poems. And, among the short poems, the ones on nationalist themes are really less important, than those on social, mystical and them general subjects, though one should concede that it was the former which secured for him the adulation among the masses and, of course, got him into all kinds of trouble, too. Nationalist

songs were extremely relevant at the time they were composed, they were timely; for that same reason they are much less important today,meesage-wise; they can be studied chiefly for their lyrical value.

The collection of songs on Kaṇṇa<u>n</u> twenty-three in number, ranks very high among Pārati's creative works. They reflect at once his deep roots in the culture and the old, ageless wisdom of the country and his penchant for innovation. The Scriptures of the country insist on an all-comprehending, all pervasive role for God who enters into a variegated range of relationship with man in His anxiety to save, protect and eventually to emancipate him. The Āḻvārs and Nāya<u>n</u>mār have sung of God in different relationships, reaching a high-water-mark of hymnal poesy. Pārati takes up this concept and works it up in his own way, touching lyrical heights in many places; there is tenderness, deep love, gratitude, admiration; there are passages where there is subtle humour as in Kaṇṇa<u>n</u>, the servant.

There is a charming freshness of approach in all his religious songs. In a country where people are compulsively pious and for over a thousand years poets have been mass-producing songs with a predominant religious motif, it is quite an achievement for a twentieth-century poet to strike a new note in this field. His prayers are those of a strong person who acknowledges God as supreme on account of His overwhelming love; not for him is the vengeful punishing God who weighs people's sins and consigns them to hell or heaven. His prayers are far different from those of many poets who present a long list of benefits they require God to confer on them. He prays rather for strength, tenacity, will-power and ability to achieve. And the domineering idealist in him paints a picture of men growing into Godhood so that he is able to "perceive heaven in the common earth".

The story of Pārati's spiritual apprenticeship under Kuḷḷaccāmi makes interesting reading. In these passages he shows himself to be true mystic in the long line of the cittars of this country. His reinterpretation of Rigvedic verses is strikingly original and needs

closer study than it has been accorded till now.

Pārati's songs decrying caste and the segregation of Harijans arise from the depth of his conviction that man had no right to subjugate man. The same passion for equality and against domination and exploitation made him sound the first drums of war to emancipate woman. Few people below 40 years of age reading this book can appreciate the horrible conditions under which Harijans and women lived and toiled till Pārati and Gandhi came on the scene.

Pārati's *Kuyil pāṭṭu*, in the opinion of the present writer, is over estimated. Its grotesque pictures of sexual love cutting across the barriers of biological classification are unpoetic. And no one is able to say what it all amounts to, what moral or message is conveyed through the poem.

The *Pāñcāli Capatam* is quite a different matter. With the help of a well-known epic episode, Pārati deftly conveys the plight of Mother India suffering under alien tyranny. In re-telling the epic story, Pārati adopts a freshness of approach that is peculiarly his.

Genre-wise, Pārati clearly did not favour long *purāṇam*-like or *kāppiyam*-like works. He sensed the limitations of time and patience of modern readers and fed them small dishes of concentrated good. We should not forget that Pārati was a journalist and a free-lance writer for journals and hence had to respect the limitations set by the exigencies of space. His prose articles are characterised by the same brevity of size; the sentences are short and full of force. Indeed Pārati was the pioneer in evolving a crisp and effective prose style where there had been only an involved and complex mode of expression warped by long sentences and recondite diction.

Pārati chalked up an amazing achievement during his life; and his spirit continues to influence all departments of life and work in the Tamil country. But the present writer feels that the full potential of the promise held out by his varied talents has not-been

realised. One of the reasons was, of course, his early demise. Another was that he had to suffer all through his life from poverty and political harassment making it necessary for him to migrate to Pondicherry and at other times run a constant risk of incarceration. The muse often works under adverse conditions, and works better, it has been claimed. But a lifetime of adversity necessarily cuts into the quantity and affects the quality of literary production. Many of his pieces would have registered improvement with a little polishing for which he seldom had time. His poems were often composed under the white heat of passion; they did not conform to the Wordsworthian concept of emotion recollected in tranquillity. The political movement claimed much of his time and spurred much of his poetry; we have seen how that is dated, today, it does not have the impact it had before independence. Pārati could have written more and better if he had not had to work against such a combination of malevolently adverse factors.

The poetry of Pāratitāca<u>n</u> (Bharatidasan)

Pāratitāca<u>n</u> was a most fitting successor to Pārati whom he admired as a poet and as a man. Pāratitāca<u>n</u> shared his nationalist spirit and his strong breed of religion for a certain time till he joined the Dravidian movement; after that he became an atheist and an ardent social reformer. In passionate espousal of a cause they were very much alike. Even in diction and choice of metre there is great similarity. In one important respect, however, they differ; Pārati was not given to descriptions of nature and except in *Kuyil pāṭṭu* we seldom get a portrayal of nature; Pāratitāca<u>n</u> was adept at creating unforgettable word portraits of nature. His *A<u>l</u>aki<u>n</u> Cirippu* is replete with eloquent paintings of nature where beauty smiles, according to the poet. Pārati was far too preoccupied with men and women-the toiler, the political worker, the Harijan and the harassed woman to devote time to nature. Pāratitāca<u>n</u>, schooled in the verse of old masters believed in nature as the perennial source of inspiration for

all creative artists, as an excellent theme in itself and as an evocative background for emotive situations.

Pāratitācan̲ has composed over 40 works. Unlike Pārati, he has produced many long poems of good quality which have established him at the top of the rung of Tamil poets. His *Kuṭumpa Viḷakku* and *Iruṇṭa Vīṭu Tamiḻacciyin̲ Katti, Pāṇṭiyan̲ Paricu, Cañcivi parvatattin̲ Cāral* are his major long poems where he delivers a message of significance in each, conveyed in exquisite diction and spiced with appropriate similes.

C. Balasubramanian very aptly traces Pāratitācan̲'s natural flair for describing heroic action from his deep involvement in the *Pur̲anān̲ūr̲u*. He states in his *"Puraṭcik Kaviñar Pāvēntar Pāratitācan̲"* that the *Virattāy* (a long poem) can be traced to the songs in that *Caṅkam* anthology where is described the heroism of mothers who did not want their children to be dubbed cowards and preferred them to die in battle as heroes rather than run away and live.

The student of Pāratitācan̲ is likely to discover much greater lyricism in his poems than else-where. He achieves this through a truly poetic identification with nature and through a mastery of diction; a careful nursing of the emotion through a long passage is characteristic of his poetry; he builds up the level of the sentiment through a series of cascade-like metaphors whose total effect is overpowering. Though truly a modern poet, the greatest of the post-Pārati singers in Tamil, he inherits many of the characteristic attributes of the poets of earlier epochs which enrich and reinforce the poetic quality of his output.

Tēcika Vināyakam Piḷḷai

Tēcika Vināyakam Piḷḷai who was honoured with the title *Kavimaṇi* was a contemporary of Pārati; he shows the influence of his illustrious contemporary in many passages in his muse. Piḷḷai was quite a scholar in Tamil and was teaching Tamil; his works

indicate his profound knowledge of Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyanam* and Vaḷḷuvar's *Tirukkuṟaḷ* .Apart from his many original pieces, Piḷḷai is particularly known for his very creative verse translations of many works in other languages rendered into English. *Omar Khayyam* and *Āciya Jōti* are wholly translations respectively from Fitzgerald and Sir Edwin Arnold. Besides these, the collection, *Malarum Mālaiyum* contains many translations of Gitanjali passages. The success of his verse translations owes entirely to his ability to get at the basic sentiment of the passage and convey it without much transit loss in the Tamil version.

Piḷḷai had established considerable reputation as a writer of children (verse in the years when Aḻa. Vaḷḷiyappā was growing up; they influenced him very deeply and must have urged him to become a great verse writer for children in later years, in his own right. Piḷḷai was a teacher of very young children whom he loved very much. Those who knew him intimately all aver that he himself was a child at heart, utterly guileless, and apt to derive the purest pleasure from the phenomena of nature confronting him, as children do and adults do not. Even though some of his translations are long poems he is at his best in short poems. Simple diction and an uninvolved, straightforward style of expression are his characteristics. Richness of imagery is not a feature of his poetry. If Pāratitācaṉ's muse is compared to the frothing, gushing flood waters of a great river, Piḷḷai's verse can be likened to a small pool of clear, limpid water.

Nāmakkal Rāmaliṅkam Piḷḷai

Nāmakkal Rāmaliṅkam Piḷḷai is the next poet to be considered briefly here. He is mainly known as a nationalist poet who was profoundly influenced by a short meeting lasting for a few hours with Pārati. But his output in other fields is quite considerable. He had a more forceful personality than the Kavimaṇi and was far more

involved in the problems of the toiling Indian. His poem, a lullaby sung by the wife of a Kāviri boatman to a foundling child is one of the finest composed in this century. It reflects the courage and the steadfast adherence to the moral law displayed by poor people, uncontaminated by smart urban ways.

The Nāmakkal poet can be very imaginatively idealist; in one of his poems entitled "a Poet's Dream". he declares his poetic creed in these memorable lines:

I shall sing my life away,
Carol away my cares.
The pleasures men seek I fancy not
The joy that is beyond
The beatitude that shines afar,
Out of reach of the earth-
It beckons to me. I heed the call
I yearn for that delight. (1)

He blossomed as a painter before he emerged as a poet. A painter takes in a lot more detail from his surroundings than a casual observer; he has a built-in sense of harmony of background and of proportion. These qualities served him well when he broke into song. His poems are vivid and full of colourful detail; they bespeak the poet's sense of proportion.

Like Pārati and the Kavimaṇi, the Nāmakkal poet too was at his best in the genre of the short poem. His long poem *Avaṉum Avaḷum* while good in parts is very weak in characterisation; there is inconsistency in the conduct of the hero; there is far too much perfection in the character-portraits of the chief dramatis personae to carry much realism. He shines best as a lyricist and some of his best pieces are religious in content. The most famous, however, of all his songs is the one he sang lauding Gandhiji's salt-satyagraha, the beginning lines of which can be rendered as

A war is coming!
A war without swords
A war without bloodshed,
A war is coming!

(2)

The song made him an instant celebrity; it became the marching song of the satyagrahis.

Other major poets

Kaṇṇatācaṉ attained a wide measure of popularity through his film songs. In truth there was little poetry in film songs before his advent; he could infuse true poetic fervour and lyrical beauty in them, a feat that was not thought possible before. Though his short epics like the *Māṅkaṉi* are justly famous, short poems are his best genre; they reflect his great ability to use nature as a fitting background to his portraits of sentiment. But his command over the long poem genre is also quite considerable. His long poem *Iyēcu Kāviyam* in 149 sections, published posthumously is a very ambitious attempt. There are many exalted passages in it and this long poem proclaims his versatility; behind the work lay much devoted industry in mastering the details of biblical passages. That he could do it all in fifteen days of almost uninterrupted toil must be counted as a modern miracle.

Vāṇitācaṉ's four works of poetry amount to a considerable achievent. Kampatācaṉ's impressive promise has not been fulfilled but he must rank as a major second-line poet of the post-Pārati era. Muṭiyaracaṉ and Cālai Iḷantiraiyaṉ are noted poets with a powerful social reform message; the latter is a very perceptive literary critic too.

Curatā is clearly a poet of unusual gifts. He is justly famous for his striking similes. Among his collections of poems are *Tēṉmaḻai, Cirippiṉ Niḻal, Cuvarum Cuṇṇāmpum, Tuṟaimukam.* Peruñcittiraṉār is

an advocate of severe purism in Tamil. Dr. V.C. Kuḻantaicāmi has written innovative poetry under the pseudonym Kulōttuṅkaṉ. Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan and K. V. Jakannātaṉ also have published occasional poetry under pseudonyms. Kottamaṅkalam Cuppu's poetry has a distinctive rural flavour. Tirulōka Citārām has written much serious poetry. Kā. Mu. Sheriff, Puttaṉēri Ra. Subramaniam, K.S. Krishnamurthy, Vairamuttu and Vāli are other notable names in the field. Poṉṉaṭiyaṉ is doing commendable service to the cause of poetry by publishing a periodical *Muttucaram* (a lace of pearls) solely devoted to poetry. He is organising periodical poetry-reading sessions too.

The New poetry

It is necessary here to devote a certain time to an examination of what goes by the appellation, New poetry in Tamil. This phenomenon is by no means confined to Tamil. Poetry released from the shackles of metre and rhyme has been composed for quite some time in the west. In north India, such poetry goes under the name *muktakavita* (emancipated poetry). Pārati composed many such pieces which were called prose poetry (*vacaṉakavitai*). Since his advent this kind of poetry is being composed in Tamil; it got the classification 'the New poetry' (*putukkavitai*) in the sixties. Now many magazines publish New Poetry regularly.

This New Poetry movement has invited fierce criticism and much ridicule upon itself. There are many who aver that it is certainly new but not poetry. For many, poetry is inextricably associated with form and if a recognizable form is not detectable, they conclude that the product is not poetry. The advocates of the movement argue with considerable heat that it is poetry from which the unnecessary shackles have been removed and hence it is better as poetry than the manacled variety of the earlier eras.

If we go back to the definition of poetry, there seem to be two

essentials to it; one is that it should convey some significant, meaningful experience and the other is that it should be conveyed in a form that makes the experience easily transferable from the poet to the reader. Since a short story too attempts to covey a meaningful experience, the essential difference is in the form; and poetry retains its poetriness only because of the form in which it is conveyed and from which it is inseparable.

It would be reasonable, therefore, to expect that poetry retains its status on account of the characteristic form in which it is packaged, the form including the diction, the metre, the richer use of figures of speech, a certain heightened style of expression, even hyperbole within limits, all this and perhaps more. Hence it would appear that the protagonists of the New Poetry movement have thrown away the baby along with the washwater when they have thrown overboard the poetic form.

This cry for emancipation from all shackles may be carried too far. All art remains within the realm of art only on account of the exercise of a certain restraint by the artist. It is not only in the matter of style and metre that the restraint is exercised. It comes into play in deciding how much of sentiment should be delineated, how much description of the background is called for, how much space is to be devoted to the portrayal of the character and so on. Restraint is an essential missile in an artist's armoury and if the New Poetry enthusiast thinks he has released a poet from all restraint by merely throwing overboard the poetic form, he is very much in the wrong.

And after all, the only excuse for the existence of poetry is that it purveys aesthetic delight; and a part of this certainly arises from the form. The pleasant sound effects lubricate the easy passage of a poem from the poet to the reader, the barriers in whose mind are

temporarily lowered to allow it to enter. T.K. Citamparanata Mutaliyār would insist on poetry being read aloud to catch its music. By divesting poetry of its pleasing form, a certain amount of harm is done to the aesthetic process.

In the hands of an expert new poet, however, this harm can be kept very low and genuine literary delight generated, despite the loss of form. The danger in the spread of this moment lies in the fact that since writing New Poetry appears so easy an exercise, many non-poets who have nothing significant to convey may resort to this medium. As a matter of fact much non-poetry is being perpetrated today on account of this reason and the critic and the dilettante have to be careful and a little ruthless in distinguishing the few grains from the over-whelming mass of chaff.

It is customary for the protagonists of the movement to point to the *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman as their final clinching argument. If practitioners of the new mode can produce work of the quality of the *Leaves of Grass*, every dilettante will welcome it; there need be no doubt about it. But many genuine levers covers of poetry are anxious about the situation where the very ease of the exercise could and in reality does spawn a large harvest of wordy pieces which are not classifiable as poetry.

There are good examples of New Poetry available; some pieces from Na. Piççamūrtti, Vallikkaṇṇa<u>n</u>,Ku. Pa. Rājakōpāla<u>n</u>, Ñā<u>n</u>akkūtta<u>n</u> and Vaittīsvara<u>n</u> appear to be genuine poetry. There are very many pieces in which one can detect a line or a phrase which scintillates but the rest is mere words. Perhaps New Poetry is seeking a new idiom; experimentation in art is its very life blood; the movement will be justified if a higher percentage of genuinely poetic pieces can be produced than is seen at present.

A general analysis

There have been epochs in the Tamil land when poetry was the only medium of literary expression; a consequence of this was the total neglect of prose. There have been ages in England and elsewhere too when similar conditions prevailed. It can be stated as a general principle that societies begin to produce and respect prose literature only after they begin to advance in the economic sphere. In England when the sea-routes had been discovered and under Queen Elizabeth there was a tremendous urge to trade and gather wealth, prose began to develop. Prose writing got a real fillip on the onset of industrialisation, both in the west and in the east. In India till the gaining of independence, one could not say there was much industrialisation; but after 1947 with the increasing tempo of industrial production and trade and the emphasis on gathering wealth, prose literature has made leaping progress and put poetry very much in the shade.

To the analytically minded student, there would appear to exist several reasons for this change. One is the democratisation of education, a much bigger section of the population becomes literate, but the neo-literates are not deeply enough involved to appreciate poetry. They demand stories in prose where the contents are far more important than the manner of presentation. Magazines multiply to cater to them and they have to provide a rich fare of stories if they want to stay on in business.

Urban civilization clamps down restraints on several aspects of life; one of them is a ban on the display of emotion in public. In fact manifest emotion gets a short shrift among city-dwellers. Poetry which subsists on emotion is likely to be less attractive than prose in a society where more and more people begin to live in societies and literary fashions are imitated only by urbanites.

Residence in a city where the atmosphere is in favour of acquisition of material comforts promotes a prosaic attitude to life;

urbanites read little enough and that little, they prefer, should be exciting and preferably a narrative. The pursuit of hard goods and the constant stress on a rising standard of living do something very adverse to the love of culture and scholarship and the taste for poetry. Even in the west poetry magazines sell so poorly that contributors of poetic pieces are paid poor sums for them or are encouraged to regard the very fact of publication as an honour done to them.

Psychologists have all found that one of the qualities that is seen to wear off as a result of urban living is patience. Poetry is likely to be cast in a slightly elevated diction with symbolism that is not readily interpretable. Urbanites with their depleted patience are less likely to turn to poetry which needs careful study and a certain amount of thought than to prose narrative where the style of expression offers little resistance to the mind.

Perhaps one other reason for the decreasing popularity of poetry in materially advanced societies is that interpersonal relationships undergo a sea-change in cities of the modern era. In the agrarian society, villagers used to maintain intense inter-personal ties with perhaps a dozen or twenty people. And these continued over a whole lifetime. But in city life, an average man has to enter into relationships with hundreds, perhaps with thousands of people during a lifetime. The concern, the interest and the emotional content that were distributed over twenty relationships in the earlier era are now dissipated over thousands; the result is that no relationship is deep. Alvin Toffler would call most of these urban relationships 'modular', meaning that they are based only on a single, narrow, utilitarian purpose like the relationship we bear towards our tailor or grocer. Poetry flourishes only on the basis of deeply emotional interpersonal relationships which are rare to find and nurture in the urban societies of today.

The NOVEL - a new art form

The novel is an art form that is new to Tamil Nadu. But the Tamils, as indeed all Indians, are great story tellers and the whole world acknowledges its debt to India for its fables and purāṇic stories and above everything else, the *Rāmāyaṇam*. But most Indian stories turn out to be a loose collection of a number of adventures by the same or different persons, the connection being quite a tenuous one. The *Matanakāmarācan* stories, the *Vikramātitya* tales, the episodes relating to Teṉāli Rāmaṉ and Mariyātai Rāmaṉ are all merely anthologies of stories bound together loosely with the string of a common hero. The *Rāmāyaṇam* and the *Cilappatikāram* are the two stories which are organically structured where each development is the result of a previous episode and the cause of a subsequent incident, where the parts are logically and naturally related to each other and to the whole work. The *Cintāmaṇi* is not of this type, it is a collection of the different romantic adventures of the hero. Further, miracles entered into almost every story and it was all about kings and queens.

The novel as a genre developed in the west has a central theme and the events which work out this theme all move inevitably towards a denouement which gets resolved at the end, happily, in most cases. Though the rigour of a short story is not expected of a novel, still every incident that finds a place in it, every description, every conversation reported should serve a purpose-it should help to vivify a character portrait, create the right atmosphere or advance the narrative line of the novel. A short-story presents a single significant experience while a novel may present a number of such experiences; but these should add up to something interesting and valuable.

The history of its development

The vague beginnings of the novel in Tamil are traced to as far back as 1775 but apart from translations and transparent

adaptations from English, nothing worthwhile was done in this field till 1879 when Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai published his novel, *Piratāpa Mutaliyar Carittiram.* In the preface to the work Piḷḷai frankly admitted that his purpose in writing it was didactic, he wanted ethical and moral principles to be spread among the people through this new medium. The second was a publication from Sri Lanka, a historical novel and the third, *Premakalāvātyam* by C. V. Kurucuvāmi Carmā; these were followed by *Mōkaṉāṅki*, a historical, by T. K. Caravaṇa Muttupiḷḷai. B. R. Rācam Ayyār and Mātavaiyā wrote on social themes which attracted wide attention. The former's *Kamalampal Carittiram* and the latter's *Patmavati Carittiram* held the field for a long time. Dr. Mu. Varatarācaṉ rightly commends Mātavaiyā's novels for their sharp characterisation and bold espousal of social reform; he says perceptively that Mātavaiyā contributed significantly to the development of both content and form of this genre at this incipient stage of its growth.

The movement to translate from north Indian languages has played a major part in the development of the Tamil novel . A. Ki. Cayarāmaṉ translated Bengali novels of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee which created quite a stir among Tamil fiction lovers. R. Caṇmuka Cuntaram performed commendable service by translating the novels of many great Bengali novelists. Ta. Na. Kumāracuvāmi and Ta. Na. Cēṉāpati translated Tagore's novels; they commanded a very good Tamil style and Bengali novels became quite a rage in the Tamil land. Ka. Sri. Sri. translated most of the Marātti novels of V. S. Kandekar. In addition to these there have been very good translations from the other Dravidian languages; those from Malayalam like the *Cemmiṉ* and *My grandfather used to keep an elephant* were outstanding contributions.

The historical novel

In this genre, the novel, one can discern some sub-genres, the division being based largely on the nature of the subject-matter. A

major sub-genre under this will be the historical novel. We have seen how even at the incipience, there have been writers composing novels on historical themes. The historical novel, based on some well-established facts of history but containing a greater or lesser amount of imagined fictitious matter has now became well established and exceedingly popular.

For the highly privileged position now being enjoyed by the historical novel, the writer that must be thanked is R. Krishnamurthy, universally known by his pseudonym, Kalki. He constructed his novels on the basis of historical fact; and by means of prodigious industry he was able to glean a vast amount of knowledge of the period he was writing on, of how people lived and spoke, what they ate and how they dressed, what their main entertainments were, of their hopes and fears and compensations and he used this to create an atmosphere of verisimilitude that would transport the reader to that period. There was a good deal of play for imagination too and his plots were substantial and well-designed. Apart from the historical personages whom he portrayed, he created wholly fictitious characters like Civakāmi, Āyaṉaciṟpi and Vantiyat tēvaṉ whom the reader assumes to be authentically historical figures. It is no exaggeration to say that history lives in the pages of Kalki.

His novel *Poṉṉiyiṉ Celvaṉ* on Rācarāca Cōḻaṉ is the longest of his works; but the reader is swept forward by the force of the narrative and the size of the book has never been felt as an adverse factor. The present writer remembers very clearly how eagerly tens of thousands of readers looked forward to the next instalment of this novel serialised in the magazine, *Kalki*; and when the periodical was received, there used to be fights over who in the family should have the privilege of reading the instalment first. The serial went on for over five years and we were witness over this long period to the unique phenomenon, never seen before, of all normal work being suspended in thousands of Tamil homes till the weekly instalment had been

read. While the story itself was spell-binding, Kalki's characters, duly idealised for a historical novel were extremely lovable personae, and credible ones too despite the idealisation. His descriptions of Paḻayāṟai, Pukār and the Vīrāṇam lake are inspired portraits of a gifted word-painter.

The novel next in size *Civakāmiyiṉ Capatam* is cast in the Pallava period when the Pallava army under Māmallaṉ earned deathless glory by invading the Cāḷukkiyaṉ kingdom and vanquishing the mighty army in a decisive battle. This memorable historical event is the central core around which the novel has been built up; but fictitious characters like Civakāmi and her sculptor father and Nākananti aṭikaḷ have been so beautifully drawn that generations of young people have grown up in the belief that they too are part of history.

His smallest historical novel which was his first in the order of composition was *Pārttipaṉ kaṉavu*, laid in the early 7th century and portraying Māmallaṉ's father, Makēntira Varma Pallavaṉ, the litterateur-king. This novel established Kalki in the forefront of novels in Tamil, a position that was firmly reestablished on the publication of the two greater novels which followed.

The prestigious position attained by the historical novel after Kalki naturally encouraged a large number of writers to compose in this sub-genre. But this is a demanding form and a number of qualities are needed in the successful author of historical novels. It is also possible that writers are running out of historical epochs which have sufficient potential to support an absorbing fictitious superstructure. The most popular and best-paid novelist was Cāṇṭilyaṉ whose evocative power in his writings spiced with adequate sensuality has established him at the very top. Perhaps the most talented writer composing in this sub-genre is Kōvi. Maṇicēkaraṉ. In creative power and in the casting of characters he is the equal of the best in the field; his unique additional quality is his considerable

knowledge of classical Tamil which adds depth and beauty to his descriptions. Historical fiction needs a more dignified Tamil than social novels in order the better to create the proper atmosphere of bygone eras. It is fortunate that social novels do not need much classical scholarship, as otherwise, most of today's practitioners of that sub-genre would not go far in it.

Akila<u>n</u>, the only Bharatiya Gnana Pith awardee in Tamil has written some historical fiction; *Veṅkaiyi<u>n</u> Mainta<u>n</u>* is the best known of his works in this subgenre. His historical novels are the lesser part of his contribution to Tamil literature. Nā. Pārttacārati's Vañcimānakar, Kapāṭapuram and Pāṇṭimātēvi are outstanding contributions illuminated by his attractively classical style of writing. Vikkirama<u>n</u> and Tāmaraimaṇāḷa<u>n</u> too have written historical fiction.

We referred to the likely paucity of subjects for writers in this sub-form; the Cōḻas have certainly been overwritten and the Pāṇṭiyas and Pallavas adequately covered but the Cēras appear to be the cinderellas of historical novelists. There is a further rich field to be exploited in the many happenings of import after the advent of the British into the south. There is an added advantage in selecting this period (after the 17th century) as the Tamil society of that time was not very different from that with which we are familiar.

The social novel

The next sub-genre to be covered is the serious social novel, the word serious being used to distinguish it from essentially humourous stories on the one hand and detective fiction on the other. This is the most popular from the viewpoint of patronage by the writers and the most important from the angle of the growth of the sub-genre itself. We have noted briefly the beginnings of the social novel. One of the early pioneers was Pandit Natēca Cāstiri who wrote two novels which are quite moving. Po<u>nn</u>ucuvāmi Piḷḷai's novels are noted for their strong religious bias.

Kalki was notable writer in this sub-genre, too. His *Tiyāka Pūmi* was avidly read and was converted into a high quality movie; his other social novels were *Makuṭapati* and *Alai Ōcai*. The very throb of the people's pulse can be felt in his novels; his social novels gave him greater scope for variety in character-portrayal.

A novelist who gained a certain amount of popularity in the pre-Kalki days was K. S. Veṅkaṭaramaṇi. His stories were as austere as the author himself and elevated thought and high morals were the watchwords rather than a meaty plot or a high tempo or absorbing reader interest.

Akilaṉ attained a great deal of popularity as a social novelist and his merit was recognised, as noted before, by the award of the Bharatiya Gnana Pith award. His *Pāvai viḷakku* highlights a writer who is loved by a number of girls; it may be regarded as his best novel. The *Cittirappāvai* portrays a painter who suffers at the hands of his own brother, enters into a wrong marriage and suffers a lot more and finds eventual peace and fulfilment. It was front-line writers like Kalki and Akilaṉ who changed the prevailing didactic emphasis in novels to a focus on the creation of an artistically satisfying form.

One of the greatest social novels produced in this century is *Kuriñci malar* by Nā. Pārthasarathy. T. L. Natecan writing under the pseudonym Caṅkarrām presented the very flavour of the countryside in his novels like *Maṇṇācai* R. Caṇmukacuntaram gave an enjoyable local flavour (of Koṅku countryside) to his novels. He has successfully translated some Bengali novels too. The flavour of the Tirunelvēli and Kaṉṉiyakumari districts is felt in the works of many novelists like Hephziba Jesudasan. When talking of Tirunelvēli, one is inevitably reminded of Putumaippittaṉ who has not written full fledged novels but only 2 novelettes; his work which is of the highest significance will be discussed in the subsection on the short story. In

a similar way, even though Ku. Pa. Rājakōpālaṉ too experimented writing novels, his main contribution is in the field of the short-story and his work will be discussed in the next sub-section.

Ku. Rācavēlu wrote a novel titled "1942", on the Indian struggle for independence, basing his incidents on what he actually saw and experienced during his own incarceration as a Satyagrahi. His other famous novel is *Kātal Tūṅkukiṟatu*.

Nāraṇa Turaikkaṇṇaṉ has composed a large number of novels, beginning from as early as 1927. He has the gift of presenting actual conflicts happening around him in the political and the social fields under fictitious names and the attractive varnish of his creative imagination. Another writer of note who wrote on the political conflict of pre-independence days with a sharp verve and sarcasm is Vallikkaṇṇaṉ. N. Citampara Cuppiramaṇiyaṉ and Nā. Pārttacārati too have written perceptive novels on the independence movement. Rājam Kiruṣṇaṉ portrays the struggle to free Goa from the Portuguese imperialists in a novel entitled *Vaḷaikkaram.* She is justly famous for her very sympathetic and realistic portrayal of tribal societies. Her novels show a pronounced feminist bias. Her *Kuṟiñcittēṉ* is one of the most important works of very perceptive novelist of high creativity whose *Vēr* and others are time-defying contributions to literary art.

Rā. Cu. Nallaperumāḷ wields a powerful pen and his realistic portrayal of social conflicts in novels like *Pōrāṭṭaṅkaḷ* constitutes high art. Patriotic fervour marks the novels of Jekaciṟpiyaṉ. Intirā Pārttacārati holds up to ridicule the sham practices and the exhibitionism seen in urban society. Krishnamani reveals a wonderful power of perception in his novels.

Among the prominent lady novelists, apart from Rājam Kiruṣṇaṉ, one should mention Vai. Mu. Kōtaināyaki ammāḷ, Kumutiṉi, Anuttamā, Lakṣmi, Vācanti, Kiruttikā, Civacaṅkari, Intumati and Kōmakaḷ. In fact, it is wrong to classify them all together on the basis of sex;

for, Kōtainȧyaki ammāḷ and Lakṣmi produced a large number of entertaining works of average literary merit; Kumutiṉi was a highly perceptive writer capable of high level artistry whose work is small in volume. Anuttamā's novels plumb the depths of the soul and bring out subtle psychological observations. Vācanti appears the most mature among the present writers as a literary artist; and Civacaṅkari has a strongly marked reformist tendency coming through her writings whose literary quality is quite estimable.

Mu. Varatarācaṉ and C. N. Aṇṇāturai must be classed apart from these others on account of the fact that they are famous in other fields too. Mu. Va. (as he is widely known) was a scholar-critic who had attained fame as a writer of depth on literary themes. Aṇṇāturai is a household name in the Tamil land; he was the unquestioned leader of the Dravidian movement and became chief minister before his untimely death.

Mu. Va. wrote a number of novels having very definite messages. His *Kaḷḷō Kāviyamō* ridicules the viewing of women as as inebriating agent for men while in reality she is a poem and should be respected as such. His *Neñcil oru muḷ* portrays a woman driven to earn her livelihood as a call-girl. His *Dr. Alli*, perhaps the most famous of his novels portrays a woman (Dr. Alli) who marries a dissolute person and suffers much on his account; but based on her experience of his insatiable appetite and her clinical knowledge gained from patients with venereal diseases, she writes a book on sex which brings her considerable fame. It also proves to be the means of her discovering her husband's whereabouts though he is dead of dissoluteness by the time she goes to his house. Mu. Va.'s novels have the undeniable virtue of a fine literary style; and they are strong on message; their only weakness may be in creative imagination.

C. N. Aṇṇāturai's *Raṅkōṉ Rāṭā* holds up to ridicule the hypocrisy of prominent leaders of society; the novel gives a moving account of the struggles faced by a man of values when pitted

against such powerful, unscrupulous men. His style is attractive to read. More than the plot and the characterisation, what gives the book its individuality is the sincere advocacy of rectitude and moral values by the author.

T. Jānakirāman is one of the most subtle and perceptive composers of fiction. As Ciṭṭi and Civapātacuntaram aptly observe, "the silences in between" his sentences are more eloquent than the sentences themselves. He possessed a deep knowledge of human urges, passions and restraints and he had hammered out a style sensitive enough to express his subtlest nuances. His *Mōkamuḷ* is the most famous of his novels; it pictures the deathless love of a younger man for a woman ten years his senior. His other novels are *AmmāVantāḷ*, *Uyirt tēn* and *Marappacu*. His women characters are most unusual; if measured by the canons of conventional morality, they would appear to be defective; but looked at through Jānakiraman's eyes they appear natural, they could not be otherwise. Jānakiraman was not a prolific writer; his output is quite small; but, he will not fade away from the Tamil fiction scene for quite a long time.

P. V. Rāmakiruṣṇan who prefers to write under the pseudonym, P. V. R. is an accomplished craftsman with a flair for rounded plot-construction and characterisation. While technically the critics would not fault his work; the layman would love to read it and call for more. He is one of the small number of writers in this genre that can appeal to the critic and the average reader alike.

Acōkamittiran, on the other hand will always be the critics' delight whose deep understanding of the technical and artistic requirements of the novel, the novelette and the short story and his willingness to experiment mark him out as one of the best writers of the generation; his popular appeal has always lagged behind his critical rating. A writer even less popular with the lay reader than Acōkamittiran and possessing the same high technical acumen is Cuntararāmacūvāmi.

Cujātā, the pen name adopted by Rankaracaṉ is of a different mould. He writers popular fiction but his outlook and his handling of his subject are distinctive. He is very modern and scientific in temperament; in fact he has written science fiction, a sub-genre, practically unknown in Tamil. The influence of the west is very clearly felt in all his works.

Cāyāvaṉam Kantacāmi is a writer of a rarer breed than is commonly met with. He uses the larger canvas of a novel to trace the development of a whole society by narrating the life story of a few characters. His *Cāyāvaṉam* must be regarded as one of the best novels of recent times. He is to be classified as a developmental novelist of the type of Thomas Mann of Germany. Kantacāmi has a very effective style with which he can portray sensitive scenes with realism. Much is expected of this young artist on the basis of his very considerable promise as revealed in his early work.

If Kantacāmi can portray the scenes of a Kāviri delta village in a way we can perceive its sounds and smells, David Sithayya can bring before the reader an Indian prison with its cruelties, its own inner hierarchy, the heartaches of the inmates and (the rarer) compensations coming to them. Poṉṉīlaṉ has written a remarkable novel called *Karical* where he traces the birth of labour unrest in the dry terrain of Tirunelvēli district. The work is distinctive for its very realistic handling of the conditions under which peasants live, how discontent slowly becomes vocal and grows into an effective movement despite (or perhaps because of) the fierce opposition of the capitalist owner and his agents.

Ka. Nā. Cuppiramaṇiyaṉ attained his true stature in the field of criticism; but he wrote some novels earlier which did have a certain impact on the developing genre in the Tamil country. The general public does not seem to have given him the regard due to him; but a reperusal of his novels today will reveal how much art and appeal he had packed into them. His *Poyttēvu* is a fine picture

of the relations between God and man as seen not through the eyes of a theologian or a philosopher but through the special viewpoint of an artist who proposes to tell a story. Every novel of his has a distinct and worthwhile message which in the hands of lesser people would have turned out to be a homily but which in his hands acquires the form of an enjoyable story.

Nila. Patmanāpan handles the stream of consciousness technique successfully in his novels. He has a considerable skill in evoking the local flavour. He displays great promise and his development will be watched with interest by lovers of the genre. Kiruttikā spins an unusual yarn laid in the end of the 21st century in her *Putiya kōṇanki.* She portrays with verve the drives of young people; she displays a remarkable artistry and has a high regard for the cultural values of the country.

Pālakumāran is a novelist who surfaced recently and who in a short period has attained quite a high status among the exponents of the genre. His main qualities as a novelist are a good story base, a well-developed ability at character portrayal and a fresh and enquiring attitude, not hamstrung by tradition. His fame is a measure of the tremendous hold periodicals have over the Tamil mind. His novels have been serialised in popular Tamil magazines which enjoy a respectable circulation; and every issue carrying an instalment of his novel pushes up by a notch or two his reputation as a writer. The average Tamil seems to shun books but welcomes periodicals. Novelists of merit who only publish their novels as complete books, who do not serialise them in periodicals are much less known. Kamalā Caṭakōpan offers another example of writer whose fame has been built up by a serial; her *katavu* won an award in a novel competition, and was serialised and her reputation was made. *Katavu* said to be her first novel is a fine study of the conflicts that rage in the psyche of a self-willed girl labelled as such by her parents and friends.

Jayakāntaṉ's novels

But the novelist of social themes whose works are of such calibre that the epoch can be named after him is Jayakāntaṉ. Over a career that has lasted two decades now, he has enriched Tamil with a sizeable number of novels and short stories and a small number of non-fiction works. These have been produced in the midst of hectic political activity involving public speaking and conferences and seminars; he has always been at the centre of controversies generated by his political, and social views, explosively advocated. But he is most interesting as a novelist and we should take time to discuss his characteristics as a votary of that genre.

One of his earlier novels is *Uṉṉaippōl Oruvaṉ*; here is a truly moving story of an extremely poor woman whose affection for her son through a casual affair and for her husband she marries later becomes the cause for her losing both of them each on account of her love for the other. She dies on delivering a girl child, unreconciled to either of them; but the son naturally and without fuss takes over the upkeep of his step-sister. The plot gives ample scope to the gifted writer to portray powerful psychological conflicts.

Another novel of his, too is centred on a woman, but is very different in atmosphere and message to this. *Kaṅkai eṅkē Pōkiṟāḷ?* is a novel portraying a successful career woman who had been raped while a school-student, who discovers the offender later and finds him to be a very likeable person. But he is married and has a child and so she cannot marry him; and she is not interested enough in any other male. The offender, now all solicitude for her tries his best to reduce her anguished conflict which finally ends only with her untimely death in the river Ganga.

A totally different kind of atmosphere and build-up is employed artistically to stress another facet of human nature, in *Oru Naṭikai Nāṭakam Pārkkiṟāḷ*. This actress who is the heroine falls in love

with an astute drama critic; but almost insuperable obstacles arise in the way of their marriage in the shape of objections from the critic's family to his union with a mere actress. How the obstacles are tided over and at what cost to the lovers, especially to the actress is told with art and realism in the novel.

Some of this other famous novels are "*Cila nēraṅkaḷiḷ cila maṉitarkaḷ* and *Pārīckkuppo*. He was a prolitic writer till a few years ago and his heaviest output is in the field of the novel.

Jayakāntaṉ is totally wrapped up in the business of understanding human nature; he has little time for nature and does not weigh down his novels with descriptions of background. He studies the human psyche by putting it under stress. The stress is provided very naturally by the conflicting passions of his characters. He does not pass judgement even when his characters misbehave; it is not his business to preach. He presents human nature under conflict with sufficient art for the reader to take interest in it but without artifice or concealment, thus keeping the door open for the reader to come to his own conclusion.

His defects are his style and his over-whelming preoccupation with human nature, which latter is of course his strongest forte, too. His style often becomes ragged in its attempt to unfold very deep, very subtle nuances of feelings and prejudices. From the viewpoint of style Jayakāntaṉ cannot rank very high among the novelists. His overwhelming preoccupation outruns his literary art; but, fortunately this does not happen often and on most occasions he manages to present his conflicts not as clinical reports but as enjoyable literary exercises.

Detective novels

The next kind of novel we have to study is where crime and its detection form the central core. The first great novelists who occupied the centre of the stage with this kind of novel were Vaṭuvūr

Turaicuvāmi Aiyaṅkār and J. R. Raṅkarācu. The former excelled in attractive descriptions and true-to-life portrayals of characters while the latter's detective Kōvintaṉ was a sharper, more professional portrayal. Perhaps Vaṭuvūr's work suffered towards the end in quality because of overwriting but he was a great entertainer and his popularity rating was the highest; he was, however, not always original and he could be obscene to a degree.

Two detective novels of average quality came out in 1933, *Taṉapākkiyam* by Mūrtti and *Prēmakaraṉ* by Carasvati ammāḷ. Āraṇi Kuppucuvāmi Mutaliyār was a prolific writer of novels, some of which involved the detection of a crime; he borrowed plots from western novels freely. An outstanding detective novel of this period was the *Karuṅkuyil kuṉṟattuk kolai* by T. S. T. Cāmi. This novel in three parts may have been read by every literate Tamil of that period. Mēlac civapuri Paṇayappa Ceṭṭiyār, A. Ramacuvāmy and S. S. Aruṇakirinātar wrote a number of novels in this sub-genre. S. G. Ramāṉucalu wrote a few detective novels serialising them in his magazine. Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati is said to have appreciated his work.

The recent writers in this sub-genre whose popular rating is quite high are Cujātā, Rājēntirakumār, Paṭṭukkōṭṭai Pirapākar, Tamiḻvāṇaṉ and Rājkumar.

The humorous novel

A sub-genre with never too many votaries is the humorous novel. Many Tamil writers like Kalki use humour in their novels which, nevertheless, must be rated as serious fiction on account of the basic objective and motif of the work. Works intended from start to finish as humorous entertainers are really few in number. S. V. V. who was writing in English and was persuaded by Kalki to write in Tamil started composing humorous essays that must rate as non-fiction. He then went on to serialise a number of novels with names of their principal characters as their titles, like " Civarāmaṉ"

and " Rācāmaṇi". They appeared regularly every week in the *Ānanta vikaṭan* and attracted wide attention; they have since been issued in book form. S. V. V. 's plots are somewhat loose; their story value is not their most attractive aspect. His very light style of presentation, his inspired ability to portray characters in the most realistic fashion, his parodies of socially prominent people, his wit and humour that tickle but never wound are the main ingredients that his wide readership loved and cherished in his work.

Tēvan̲, the pseudonym adopted by R. Makātēvan̲ was an extremely talented author of humorous novels; he served a period of apprenticeship under Kalki in the *Ānanta Vikaṭan̲* and later became its editor on Kalki quitting the magazine to start his own. In his method of designing plots, he was perhaps influenced by P. G. Wodehouse, the celebrated English humorist whose typically "Wodehousian situation" as it is known involves all the characters of a novel assembling in one house with very varied and often mutually opposed objectives. While his style is very humorous, he starts in the readers' minds chains of serious thought on problems of good and evil. Usually a temple figures prominently in each of his novels and there is a strong undercurrent of piety running through them. He can draw powerful character sketches that are etched permanently in the reader's psyche. It is a pity he never received the mass adulation and the critical approbation that he certainly deserved to receive. Cāvi, the pen name of Ca. Visvanātan̲ shot into fame with his rollicking *"Vāṣiṇṭan̲il Tirumaṇam"*. Pakkiyam Ramacuvami has written a number of humorous serials on the Appucuvāmi couple in the periodical *Kumutam*.

The novel outside Tamilnadu

In Sri Lanka, the Tamil novel has had a fecund growth. The historical novel *Acan̲ Pēy* by Citti Levvai Maracair published in 1885 was set in Cairo, Beirut and India; it must rank as one of the

pioneering attempts in Tamil novel genre. The Tamil society in Sri Lanka has been subjected to roughly the same stresses as that in the Tamil land; and it has been influenced by the same upsurges and movements like the Dravidian and the Marxist as their parent land. Hence the themes of SriLankan Tamil novels are roughly the same as those of the novel, of Tamilnadu. The more important novelists of Sri Lanka are Kaṇēcaliṅkaṉ, K Taniyel (caste conflicts) K.Kunarācā (lower echelons of society),Y. Peṉeṭikṭ and Televatai Joseph (tea garden workers), V. A. Racarattiṉam (Batticalao local dialect), A. S. Murukāṉantaṉ (novelettes with a rural flavour) and A. Pāḻamaṉōkaraṉ (jungle life). Special mention should be made of Ilaṅkīraṉ, a Muslim novelist who has written a number of popular novels after the pattern of Akilaṉ of Tamil Nadu. S. Poṉṉuturai's novels *Ti* and *Caṭaṅku* deal with artistic sensibility, the basic sex thrust of man. One of the best novels to come out of Sri Lanka is *Avarkaḷukku Vayatu Vantuviṭṭatu* by Aruḷ Cuppiramaṇiyaṉ. In this the author presents the happenings in the space of 48 hours which indicate the emotional maturity of all the six characters featured in it; as Ciṭṭi and Civapātacuntaram in their very perceptive book observe, this novel indicates how the Tamil novel of Sri Lanka itself has come of age, even as the characters in it are portrayed to have done.

The development of this genre in Malaysia has not perhaps been as rapid as in Sri Lanka but is picking up. Ma. Ramiah appears to be the outstanding novelist of the country; his *Etirvīṭu* has received popular acclaim. Cantirakānt, Aṟivāṉantaṉ, Ceṇkuṭṭuvaṉ, Kurucuvāmi, Perumāḷ, Cantiracēkar, Aṉṉa Māry and Caṇmukam are noteworthy Tamil novelists of the country. As in the case of the Sri Lankans, Malaysian novelists too had been setting the scene of their stories in the Tamil land. It is a sign of their maturity that in both the countries, writers are now writing with their own countries as background. The conflicts generated by the old hierarchy of castes and the new social order created by money and status are dealt

with realistically in the background of the rubber plantations of Malaysia. Even in the matter of handling the language, Malaysian Tamil writers use in their dialogues a kind of local patois where colloquial Tamil is spiced freely with Malay and Chinese words.

The short story

Like the novel, the modern short story is an import from the west. Indians are experts in story telling and their prowess in this field is famous all over the world. Perhaps a high percentage of stories current in the world including fables can be traced to India. But the modern short story is not a logical successor of this native genre. Though it is difficult to define any art form, one can approximate to a description of the true personality of a short story when one says it is a rounded form which presents a significant experience in the most economical and effective manner. Unlike the novel, the centre of a short story should be a single experience though one or two incidents can be used to lead up to it. By "rounded form" is meant a literary form in which the central issue is nicely tied up so that loose ends do not float freely. Thus, a short story should describe an emotion-centred experience in such a way that a problem that was stated or could be inferred at the outset, stands solved at the end. Any loose militarist or romantic adventure of a hero of the type dealt with the Odyssey or the Mataṉakāmarācaṉ series may not necessarily qualify as a short story; there may be no emotion-centred experience at the core and, more importantly there may be no "roundedness" about the structure or form. Many novices apprenticed to the practice of the art make the mistake of ignoring the need to compose their story to a rounded form.

The birth of the genre

Va. Vē. Cu. Aiyar's story entitled *Kuḷattaṅ-karai aracamaram* is universally regarded as the pioneering attempt at writing short stories in Tamil. Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati is said to have identified himself

with one of the characters in it and felt deeply anguished at her fate. Aiyar's collection of stories under the title *MaṅkaiyarkkaraciyiṉKātal* and other stories came out in 1957 giving a great fillip to the genre. He was followed by A. Mātavayyā whose *Kucikar Kuṭṭikkataikaḷ* were a significant contribution to the genre. Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati's services to the short story should not be forgotten, in any account of the growth of the genre in Tamil.

The *Maṇikkoṭi* magazine spawned quite a revolution in short-story writing; its main contributors among whom can be mentioned Ku. Pa. Rācakōpālaṉ, Putumaippittaṉ, Va. Rā, B.S.Rāmaiah, Na. Piccamūrtti, Ci. Cu. Cellappā, Mauṉi and Ka. Na. Cuppiramaṇiyaṉ were to dominate the short story scene for some years. Of these we may pick the first two as the most significant sculptors of this art form; any novice who wants to cultivate short story writing has to study their work with devotion, especially their mastery of the form. They both should be rated as geniuses and they both died young, perhaps as a result of malnutrition. Rācakōpālaṉ wrote in the patois of the Kāviri basin whileputumaippittan composed in the Tirunelvēli patois which he immortalised in his writings.

Putumaippittaṉ, born in 1906 as Viruttācalam (the earlier being his assumed name by which he is universally known) had early tragedies and led a difficult life throughout. He got progressively so embittered that while his earlier stories reflect the sadness of the human condition to a realistic degree, his work towards the end of his short career began to betray his total pessimism and hence turned out to be somewhat inartistic.

He was a distinguished member of the *Maṇikkoṭi* group; indeed he was the greatest exponent of the short story genre, along with Ku. Pa. Rācakōpālaṉ. One of his greatest creations is *Kaṭavuḷum Kantacuvāmip piḷḷaiyum.*

Ku. Pa. Rācakōpālan̲, known as Ku. Pa. Rā. to the Tamil world was born in 1901 and like Putumaippittan̲ lived a hard life of deprivation and died young. They lived approximately the same length of life. They were both members of the brilliant group of writers called the *Maṇikkoṭi* group. They both experimented with the form; they were, both of them, unequalled masters of this testing genre, the short story. But there were interesting differences between them, too.

For one thing, Ku. Pa. Rā. concentrated on an emotion-filled moment and designed his story around that; he felt convinced that emotions are the greatest things in man's life and he carried his conviction to his art. He was not interested in how they arose, he was concerned only with how they influenced man and urged him to action. Putumaippittan̲ interested himself in all aspects of emotions and delved deep into them; and he presented them in such a way that their fundamental irreconcilability with the truths of life suggested itself to the reader. Ku. Pa. Rā. did not present them as a contrast to life's truths but as an interesting study in themselves.

Ku. Pa. Rā's stories were mostly about the man-woman relationship; indeed he appeared to have been preoccupied with it. Putumaippittan̲ had a wider range of artistic interests. As a result, perhaps, of this wide range of interests he had, he was more interesting to read than Ku. Pa. Rā. The latter's stories sometimes had a bare fleshlessness, when they appeared like clinical studies and not pieces of art. But at his best, he was wonderful, a master of the art. His "*Viṭiyumā?*" "*Atimaran̲ṭāl Alam*" and "*Arccanairupai* " are outstanding creations that will not die or go out of vogue, ever.

There was an important writer who is known only by his pen-name, "Maun̲i". His output is small but his work has been praised by the top artists of this genre like Putumaippittan̲. His artistic characteristic is to describe the thoughts arising in the mind of a character in order to explain the situation it is in. This is not an

easy way to tell a story and hence there are not many who have attained success in it. This is the method we see in successful operation in many of the *Caṅkam* lyrics. This is a wholly subjective method; and because subjectivity is ideally suited for art, it becomes a potent device in the hands of gifted writers like Mauni. "Pirapañca kāṉam" is one of his best stories. His stories were preoccupied with an individual's emotional life; this was at once their merit and their limitation.

K. Civattampi compares Mauṉi with Lā. Cā. Rāmāmirtam whom he regards as Mauṉi's successor and in a finely analytical passage, he shows how the "thought wave" method adopted by Mauṉi is at its incipient stage of development and his faulty characterisation warps it to a degree. He regards Lā. Cā. Rā's work as an improvement over that of Mauṉi but on the lines indicated by the latter. Some, however, feel that Lā. Cā. Rā.'s stories are not very interesting to read, that the common run of readers will not derive any pleasure out of them and that his style is too abstract for the fiction field.

The trend towards espousal of social and economic causes in short stories was developed by D. M. K. writers like Aṇṇaturai and Karuṇāniti and by labour-oriented writers like Vintaṉ. The latter did write some stories which can be regarded as valuable contributions to the genre. Citampararakunātaṉ has works in more than one genre to his credit; his short stories, reflecting the struggles of the working class are certainly good; but he has recently turned his attention to other forms of writing.

Akilaṉ's stories display a significant craftsmanship rather than any great creative gift. Na. Piccamūrtti's writings indicate a deeply thoughtful, philosophical bent of mind. Ku. Alakiricāmi was one of the junior members of the *Maṇikkoṭi* group. He wrote stories which had beauty of form and satisfied all the technical requirements

which delight the critics ; at the same time, his stories are attractive to read and appeal to everyone. He did not share the pessimism of some of his senior colleagues but wrote bright pieces which leave a lasting impression on the reader. A realism and a sense of humour are noteworthy features of his work. Māyāvi's stories entertain through the strength of their plot.

T. Jāṉakirāmaṉ was a noteworthy creator of short stories who could please critics and laymen at once. He tells his stories through the dialogues of his characters, the author seldom intervening to make observations. He suggests a great deal through his wonderful command of the language which reflects, to an outstanding measure, the racy patois of the Kāviri basin. He delights in portraying individuals, not types, reflecting his unchangeable belief in the individuality of man, in whatever station of life he may be placed.

Jeyakāntaṉ is a major writer of short stories which reflect his deep, enquiring mind and his matchless knowledge of the mental springs of action in man. His style which often becomes rugged on account of the heavy load of thought it is made to carry does not stand in the way of the enjoyment of his work. As Civattampi points out very aptly, Jeyakāntaṉ is one of the few who can fulfil the two requirements, considered by many as mutually opposed, of literary excellence and easy readability.

In Sri Lanka and Malaysia, the short story has had a development very similar to that in Tamil Nadu with personalities that correspond to writers in the mother country. For instance Campantar concentrates on subtle emotional states just like Mauṉi. Vaittiyaliṅkam and Civañāṉacuntaram in Sri Lanka and a host of writers with names like Velucuvāmi, Nakumānalaṉ, Iḷamvaḷuti and Mahēsvari in Malaysia are chiefly associated with the development of the short story in these countries.

STAGE, RADIO AND TV PLAYS

Playwriting was not perhaps regarded as a literary exercise worthy of the greatest litterateurs in the earlier epochs. It was probably the custom for the actors to improvise the lines as they went. As the plays were mostly staged in street corners for villagers without much education, the dialogues were strictly utilitarian with no pretensions to literary quality. Even though the Tamil took a number of concepts from the Sanskrit world like those of the epic poem and the *purāṇams*, he did not benefit by the spectacular advance of the drama and the play literature in Sanskrit.

There are references to works on dramaturgy in Tamil commentaries but none of them is available today. A work setting forth the rules of dramaturgy called the *Ceyiṟṟiyam* which was available during the time of Aṭiyārkku Nallār and from which he has quoted some rules is no longer available. The difficulties experienced in copying a manuscript determined a rigorous priority order of importance for manuscripts; and clearly the Tamil, in the last 1000 years attached a very low priority to plays and grammars of the stage and such works failed to be copied and kept.

It is possible that no written text was used by the actors in Tamil plays and they improvised the lines as they went. There are at least three major disadvantages deriving from this. One is that this improvisation may cause confusion now and then; actors may say more or less than what is expected of them; and they will not know when exactly the speaker has finished his lines, so that there may be interruptions all the time.

A major disadvantage is that the lines improvised by actors on the spur of the moment are bound to be less deep, less literary and altogether less satisfactory than the dialogue written by a trained

and gifted playwright after considerable thought in the privacy of his study. The level of the great sayings in the plays of Shakespeare and Kalidasa will not be there in the improvised lines of non-literary members of the cast who may manage to convey merely the functional part of the dialogue. This greatly impoverishes the quality of the stage play.

The third disadvantage constitutes a major loss to the society. Plays can be read as literature with pleasure and profit; perhaps, against ten people who speak and hear Shakespeare's lines on the stage, a hundred or more study them in universities and homes. As Sanskrit plays are seldom staged nowadays, the ratio of those who study them to those who speak and hear the lines on the stage must be much higher in their cases. There is a saying in Sanskrit, "The objective of acquiring the talent to compose poetry is eventually to write plays." The best of Sanskrit literature, undoubtedly is drama; the best poets made it a point to write a play or two; some, like Bhasa, Cudraka, Bhavabhūti and Vicākhadatta have composed only plays and no epic poems; it came to such a pass that fluent versifiers, calling themselves poets, with little or no ability at dramatisation felt compelled to compose plays; the best examples of this category are Murāri and Rājacēkara whose work defies production on the stage.

The characteristic of a play, in contra-distinction to a novel is that every event, even descriptions and thought processes and feelings will have to be expressed as a character's version. In epic poems, the poet could put in hundreds of verses in his own version as poets have done everywhere. This facility is denied to a playwright who has to find proper characters through whose versions every little bit has to be conveyed. Then there are the famous three unities of Aristotle to be observed in every play; the Sanskrit playwright and the dramaturgist recognise their value and the former observes them as far as he possibly can in play writing. There are

other major regulations controlling the structure and form of a play; a play is a highly controlled genre and the regulations have not been enacted in exercise of a will to tyrannise, they are necessary for the success of the works composed in this exacting genre.

Hence, whatever the reasons why a dramatic literature failed to develop in Tamil, it is regrettable that it did not prosper and Tamil that is wonderfully rich in most ways is impoverished on this account. The *Caṅkam* poet singing love lyrics realised the value of a character's version over the poet's and no love lyric of that epoch has been presented in the version of the poet. A literary community that had realised the value of a character's version long before any other in the world could have produced great plays if it had set its heart to it. It is a pity it did not.

So the history of Tamil dramatic literature starts at the close of the 19th century when Professor Cuntaram Piḷḷai composed the *Maṉōṉmaṇīyam*. The play has good poetry here and there but is not successful as a stage play. Vi. Kō. Cūriyanārāyaṇa Cāstiri wrote a few plays in the stiff pedantic style associated with him; most of the lines will go high above the heads of the spectators. These were, really speaking operas, not straight plays as the lines were in verse form. Cāstiri also wrote the first and only extant work of dramaturgy in Tamil. Apart from Cāstiry's operas, there are at least two other remarkable operas, one entitled *Vicuvanātam* by C. S. Muttucuvāmi Iyer and the other, *Pukaḻēnti* by A. Naṭarāca Piḷḷai. Both are historical and are of considerable merit. Both the play-wrights have spun a web of imagination within the framework of factual history and their handling of the theme, their portrayal of character and of sentiment are of a high order.

Plays with a definite social message were written by C. N. Aṇṇāturai and Karuṇāniti and successfully staged. S. D. Cuntaram, Veṅkaṭacalam and B. S. Ramaiah have written good plays which have achieved a good measure of popular success.

Pammal Campanta mutaliyār

No account of Tamil plays can be complete without the significant role played by Pammal Campanta Mutaliyār. His first work came out in 1895. He was a tireless protagonist of the stage play and by writing a number of adaptations and original plays and by producing plays and acting in them, he served the cause with talent and dedication. His memoirs of his stage experiences are a delight to read. In reality he must be regarded as the father of the straight play in prose, intended to be produced, with detailed directions for the actors and the director and the stage manager.

Another figure of note in the early days was Catāvatāṉam Kiruṣṇacuvāmip pavalar whose plays were very popular. Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ was a vital personality in the field of Tamil plays and today's stage owes much to his dedication and initiative. Aru. Rāmanātaṉ's Rācarācacōḻaṉ must be regarded as the best historical play in Tamil. Kalki's *Civakāmiyiṉ Capatam* has been converted into a play and successfully staged. TKS Brothers, Maṉōkar and Cahasranāmam and Nawāp Rācamāṇikkam, Kaṉṉaiyā and Pālāmaṇi of earlier days are the chief producers of quality plays to whose industry and perseverance and willingness to sacrifice their personal good we owe the present development of the Tamil stage.

Radio and T. V. plays are striving to find an idiom. It is a truism that while the farce has attained quick maturity in Tamil with "Mēriṉā"excelling in them, serious drama is yet to achieve resspectability. The standard achieved in respect of serious play-writing and production in Tamil is not to be compared with that in Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marati and Bengali.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

This collective genre (collective because there can be stories and songs and even novels for children) is a matter of recent development, all over the world. In the world of yesterday, elders wrote

for the entertainment or instruction of the elders; they also wrote text-books for children to be used in schools; they can scarcely rank as literature. The Sanskrit world wrote fables - the most famous and certainly the oldest of them-but their style and tone were not such as to be readily understood by children without adult help. That there could be a whole class of literature expressly intended for children which they would love to read seems to be a concept that has grown up with the increasing importance being attached to children's upbringing; it may also have acquired a boost with the democratisation of education and a rising standard of living. Books cost a tidy sum and it needs a certain extra interest in the value of such study on the part of the parents to invest it in books.

There was, of course, an oral tradition in India, of the grandmother telling stories to children who loved to hear them. And a ꞓ at deal of knowledge was derived from such interested listening, more of its this way than through the formal schoolroom instruction which all healthy-minded children detested. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the stories classified under titles like *Mataṉakāmarācaṉ katai* and Vikkiramātittaṉ katai were learnt entirely in this manner. Songs too were learnt from older relatives and contemporaries; many of these were used in games which they played with gusto. Some songs are of the nature of conundrums and puzzles to be solved.

But the launching of written books specifically intended for children had to await the provision of a grant of Rs.1 lakh by the Government of India in 1813 specifically earmarked for the development of education in India. This grant which must be considered quite sizeable at the value that money had at that time was used to start several good schemes, one of which was to publish books for children. This was mainly in the hands of the Christian clergy who naturally used it to propagate their religion; but their efforts must be lauded as those of pioneers in the field. Books for children were written and published by some Tamil scholars too like Kā. Nama-

civāya Mutaliyār, Vi.Vicuvanāta Piḷḷai and Ci. Vai. Tāmōtaram, Cūriyanārāyaṇa Cāstiri and so on. Some of these books contained stories from the *Pañcatantra* and the *Bible*. The emphasis placed on silent reading in the curriculum encouraged the writing and publication of books which could be easily read, understood and enjoyed by children without adult help.

The beginning of this century saw an acceleration in the books intended for children. Tēcika Vināyakam Piḷḷai and Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati wrote poems for children which did not need interpretation. Following Pārati, Pāratitācaṉ wrote many poems and songs expressly intended to be sung by children. Journals intended for adults added a section for children where stories and songs were included with illustrations.

Aḻa. Vaḷḷiyappā's work

The greatest worker in the field of children's literature was Aḻa. Vaḷḷiyappā whose recent death has removed from the scene a dedicated writer who loved children and wrote only for them, never departing from this self-chosen mission. He seems to have derived inspiration from Tēcika Vināyakam Piḷḷai's poems which he had enjoyed as a child. He was employed in a bank and hence he could write only in his spare time. But such was his devotion to the cause and his prodigious industry that he developed into a one-man movement for the furtherance of the cause. He formed a children's writer's society in 1950 to further the cause dearest to his heart. His devotion to the cause together with his sweetness of disposition and infinite capacity for friendship have been responsible for many writers turning to children's literature as a part-time or even whole-time avocation. Once they were persuaded to write for children, he used the society to encourage them in all possible ways and recognise their merit through award of prizes.

Vaḷḷiyappā wrote several songs for children which have been

issued in two volumes under the title *"Malarum Uḷḷam"*. His songs are notable for the rare insight into what a child wants, what makes its heart joyful; the diction employed and the metre used are simple enough for a child to handle. It is a tribute to Vaḷḷiyappā's deep understanding of child psychology that many of his songs have been committed to memory with ease by generations of children who love to recite them.

In the medium of prose, Vaḷḷiyappå has written in all the genres. His short stories have come out under the titles *Umåvi¯ Pūṉaikkuṭṭṭi* , *Rōcāc ceṭi* and *"Eṅkāḷ Pāṭṭi.* He has also published some translations of short stories for children from other languages.

His longer stories for children, three in number are *'Ammāvum Attaiyum'*, *'Nalla Naṉparkaḷ* and *'Kutiraic cavāri'*. He has published two other books containing adaptations of Cataka stories and Grimm's Fairy Tales. He has also published two regular novels for children entitled *'Burmā Ramaṇi"* and *'Nīla Māla'*.

Vaḷḷiyappā had a special method, all his own, of presenting biographies of great men in such a way that children would be interested to read them. He has published two such volumes under the title 'Periyār Vāḻvilē' where he has selected and narrated only the interesting and significant episodes in the lives of great men in a style certain to grip the minds of young folk. He also wrote a work narrating the childhood incidents of 38 world celebrities for which he got an award from the Government of Tamil Nadu. He followed it up with another similar volume which too made its mark in the field. He has authored three volumes of biographies of those who wrote books for children like Anderson and the Grimm brothers.

In 1969 he produced an unusual book containing photographs of Jawaharlal Nehru playing with children along with necessary explanations. He took great trouble to collect these photographs, some of them from the consulates and foreign offices of other countries which the charismatic leader visited.

His articles have been published in two volumes, one predominantly humorous. He has also written a number of articles on the working of modern institutions like banks, railways etc. in a way children can understand. He has been editing children's magazines all his adult career.

Vaḷḷiyappā believed in the corrective value of literature especially that intended for children. But he was too much of an artist to allow his writings to deteriorate into mere homilies; he made his work extremely attractive to the young folk and their love and esteem for him is standing proof of that.

Vaḷḷiyappā himself edited magazines specifically intended for children, like Pāppa, Tamāram, Caṅku and Pūñcōlai. In one of them, he devoted a few pages exclusively for adults, thus making the cycle come the full round 'Ampuli māmā' is a good children's periodical. Most magazines for adults carry a special supplement for children.

A general review of the genre

This collective genre is still in its infancy in Tamil. The main reason for its very slow growth is economic; in a society where even books for adults have a poor sale, it is not surprising that children's books have a low sale potential. These sell mainly in cities where the upper middle classes are prepared to spend a little over books for children. This limited amount may not always be spent over Tamil books. Books in English for children command a much larger sale as they can be marketed all over the country; hence they carry attractive illustrations and are reasonably priced.

It will certainly take a long time for this economic factor to get corrected. But in the meantime millions of children are growing up without developing a taste for reading. Hence perhaps the leaders of society should ponder over the matter and solve the hassles by subsidising the publication of children's books and by liberally stocking

libraries with them. Whereever possible, separate libraries for children can be established with low-slung book racks and the habit of browsing can be encouraged. As this collective genre needs a special kind of authorship, attractive terms will have to be offered to writers to get the right kind.

Genrewise, the requirements have already been stated in the passage devoted to Vaḷḷiyappā who had all the right mental and emotional qualities needed for this. The collective genre needs not only a simplified style but simplified subjects; further, the author should be capable of entering a child's psyche, develop empathy for the tiny tots and see the world of men and things as they see them. An overwhelming love for the young is a desideratum.

As children develop very fast, what is good reading for a six-year-old is too bland for an eight-year-old. Hence books for children should be specifically aimed for different age groups and a distinction has to be made in the choice of subjects for girls and boys.

PROSE NON-FICTION

We may now examine briefly the works of prose non-fiction. The oldest works of this type in Tamil were commentaries on poems. After the 12th century, the writing of commentaries became very popular; grammar works were explained with a number of very clear illustrations by commentators like Iḷampūraṇar. The *Caṅkam* works were all commented upon by Naccin̲ārkkin̲iyar, Pērāciriyar and others who possessed admirable scholarship, though they were sometimes unsure about *Caṅkam* literary traditions that had been dead a thousand years. The fashion continued and spread and all scholars who could not compose poetry staked a claim to immortality by writing commentaries on other's poetical compositions. As poetry is, always, in every clime and time, set in a higher diction than that used in every day life situations and later Indian poets delighted in using all kinds of verbal tricks which concealed the

meaning rather than revealed it, these commentaries served a certain purpose; students came to depend on them and copies were made of them with greater readiness than of original works. Indeed, we have been able to unearth and make out the text of many poetical works only from the commentaries on them. These commentaries were seldom critical; they always lauded the poems and were silent about their defects. Thus, unfortunately, when this institution of commentaries could have served to develop a critical acumen, it failed entirely to do anything of the kind. Perhaps there was a certain egotism in it, for the commentators might have felt that if the original work is faulted (even justifiably) it would mean that their judgment in selecting the work for commenting is itself thrown into doubt.

Thus Tamil entered the age of prose with practically no worthwhile works in that medium excepting these uncritical commentaries. But slowly fiction and, even more slowly, non fiction began to develop. This development owed itself to several factors which we have discussed earlier in this chapter. Even now poetry continues to be written but the emphasis is all on prose. Fiction is much the more popular variety, naturally; but non fiction genres have enjoyed a certain development in the last hundred years and we can now consider them, classified under distinct genres.

THE ESSAY

The essay, as a literary genre, constituting a "loose sally of the mind" where everything is viewed at through the coloured glasses of the writer's personality is very much a product of the western impact on Tamil society. This classification excludes all pieces where some information is seriously sought to be conveyed about science, politics, economics or any of the knowledge subjects; when it seeks only to inform, it cannot aspire to be classified as literature; it becomes valuable as a literary genre only if the experience of the writer is

sought to be presented with the sole objective of promoting enjoyment. And before we enter into details and lose the wood for the trees, we may as well confess that Tamil is quite weak in this genre, that a Lamb, an Addison, a Hazlitt is yet to be born here, even perhaps that the Tamil temperament may not be ideally suited to either the composition or the delectation of this peculiar, demanding literary genre.

To a limited extent the essays in the *Vinōtaracamañcari* of Viracuvāmi Ceṭṭiyār can be looked upon as the pioneering attempt at essay-writing in Tamil. Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati introduced a crisp, sensitive prose style in the essays he wrote. Makiḻnaṉ, the penname of Cantōcam has made a creditable contribution to this genre through his innovative and light essays included in his "*Vaṭakkum,teṟkum*". Humour and the light touch, an attitude of badinage characterise the best of the western essays. This type of essay writing was popularised by the weekly magazine Āṉantavikaṭaṉ through the essays of the immortal Kalki who trained up a team of light essayists like Tumilaṉ and Nāṭōṭi. S. V. V. who wrote many light essays in English preferred to write stories in Tamil; but he should be regarded as one of the great contributors to this genre. His "*Ullāca vēlai*" challenges a critic's efforts at categorization; but the present writer would rather call the units in the memorable work essays and not stories.

Out of these, Kalki outshines the rest with ease. At one stage he was filling up issues of Āṉantavikaṭaṉ with articles on different subjects, signing each with a different penname; and, like Goldsmith he touched nothing which he did not adorn. In fact his critical essays on music concerts were read with delight for their language and their penchant views even by those that did not care much for music. Truly it can be said that there is none to succeed him to the mantle of essayist.

Pe. Tūraṉ had the sensitive mind of a poet; he brought it into use in his essays, collected under the title *Tēṉ Ciṭṭu*. Tūraṉ believed in conveying a clear message - usually ethical - through his writings. Putumaippittaṉ achieved a certain distinction in this genre, too, though he shall always be cherished as the greatest short story writer in Tamil. Mu. Va. was a good essayist too, though he had little humour; he could convey his ideas through dialogues which were convincingly constructed. Ci. Cu. Cellappā commands a light style and in his collection of essays *"Kuṟitta Nērattil"* he manages to convey quite a range of subtle concepts through characters whom he introduces into these pieces.

Aptul Rahim makes dexterous use of the experiences undergone by others to preach homilies in a manner that is interesting to read. Tumilaṉ has a gift of humour; in his "*Āṉanta ōviyam*" he presents vignettes of interesting personality profiles with imagination. Kaṇṇatācaṉ can teach a memorable lesson or two through the dexterous portrayal of his own feelings in his collection named *Rāka mālikā*. Nāmakkal Rāmaliṅkam Piḷḷai who, too, like Kaṇṇatācaṉ can handle prose, in addition, primarily, to being a poet has woven a highly readable bunch of essays based on his own experiences. Cālai Iḷantiraiyaṉ wields a facile pen to write readable essays which have deeper undertones. The last three embellish their pieces with fine literary quotations and concepts that arise from their personal involvement with the Muses.

Ideally a writer will produce an essay only when he is moved by his own inner impulses to expression. But in the context of today, most writers, especially those who are professionals produce an essay when the editor demands one or when bills accumulate and clamour to be paid. They are, in the circumstances, forced compositions, not natural evocations. While what has been said just now is true for all literary production, the mood of the writer counts for everything in the case of an essay and forced compositions may not always turn

out to be good as the mood while writing them may not have been creative. It is for this reason that even in the cases of the best practitioners of the art, one finds a great inconsistency in quality. Only rarely, as in the case of Kalki, do we find a writer diving and bringing forth a pearl every time.

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

From the *Caʃkam* days onwards, bards in balladizing kings and chieftains have furnished biographical glimpses of their hero; these have generally to do with their martial exploits and their penchant for giving largess. We find detailed biographical references in *kāppiyams* and the minor pirapantams like *ulâ* and *Piḷḷaittamiḻ* and *paraṇi.* But there was no attempt to produce systematic biographies till the window to the west was opened for us. Even in this hundred year period one should say with disappointment that great works of biography have not appeared. The only exception is the *Periyapurâṇam* which has been discussed in some detail earlier.

One reason for this is that the personalities selected are not really biographable; they are mostly politicians who occupy the centre of the stage for a brief period with thunderous fan-fare, girt in the gaudy habiliments of political office, who fade away the moment they fall from power, leaving not a wrack behind. But while they are in power, writers seek favour from them by writing highly uncritical biographies which, lacking inner worth, prove evanescent.

A second reason for the poverty of Tamil in this genre is the paucity of writers with interesting minds who can winnow out the grains of readable material from the mountain of chaff they collect. Readers familiar with the three-minute biographies and vignettes and thumb-nail sketches in English would readily recognise how necessary it is for a biographer to select with care the few episodes from a long life which are good to read and which throw a flood of light on the personality discussed.

Periyapurāṇam, as noted earlier, is the only work of authenticity in this genre composed in the two thousand years of Tamil literary history. Unfortunately the Kuruparampara pirapavams produced in accord with the Vainava tradition include a large number of apocryphal stories and are to be regarded as works of devotion rather than factual records. The many biographical notes occurring in the commentaries of Periyavācan̲ Piḷḷai and other Vainava commentators are of far greater value and are extremely interesting to read. Praise of these commentaries should not end here; for, the commentators make use of these biographical sketches (of scholars and devotees like Nampiḷḷai, Nañcīyar, Naṭāttur amman̲) in the most appropriate places, often to illuminate a verse or answer an objection to a point raised by it.

Except for these sparse cases, ancient Tamil Nadu did not possess and biography, The stories of the lives of poets in*Vinōtaracamañcari*, *Pulavar Purāṇam* and *Tamil Nāvalar Caritai* are early examples of biographies in the modern era though all the 'facts' contained in them cannot be vouchsafed for. It is said that in the last quarter of the last century, lives of Lord Clive and Columbus in Tamil were published. There are more than one biography of very prominent statesmen and leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Kamaraj and Aṇṇāturai; there are many books, part biography, part literary criticism on Cuppiramaṇiya Pārati.

The Sahitya Akademi has published a series of short biographies of India's greatest sons who have left a mark in different spheres. There are biographies of a number of scientists in one volume. We occasionally see great administrators like Visvēsvaraiah and a captains of industry like G.D.Naitu.

As was noted earlier, Aḻa. Vaḷḷiyappā wrote "limited biographies" of the early days of great men. Pūvai Amutan̲, too, has written a similar work. The present writer has written Gandhi's life, not in the customary manner, but by presenting some episodes in his life

which reveal certain characteristic personality traits of the hero.

Dr. U.Ve. Cāminātaiyar's biography of his preceptor Makāvittuvāṉ Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai is a well-written work as also Mu. Namacivāyam's biography of Lāl Pakatūr Cāstiri. Thiru. Vi. Kalyāṇacuntaraṉār's work on Gandhi is much more than a biography; it is a brilliant estimate of the impact of Gandhi on human society. Mu. Varatarācaṉār's *Aṟiñar Bernand G.B. Shāw*, Rakunātaṉ's *PutumaippittaṉVaralāṟu*, Kalki's *Mantarukkuḷ oru Tēyvam*, Kaucikaṉ's Dr. Rādhākiruṣṇaṉ, Comalē's *Paṇṭitamani* and Maṟai Tirunāvukkaracu's Maṟaimālai aṭikaḷ*Varalāṟu* are notable works in this genre. So Civapātacuntaram wrote a series of works with the title "In the footsteps of ....". his books in this series on Gautama Buddha and Māṇikkavācakar are of considerable importance, the theme being handled with unusual reverence and freshness of approach.

Autobiographies

If good biographies in Tamil are hard to come by, good autobiographies are still rarer to find. Āṉantaraṅkam Piḷḷai's Diary and Pārati's *"Pārati aṟupattāṟu"* may be considered as the first works of an autobiographical nature in Tamil. Tiru. Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntaranār has written an account of himself which is worth a perusal. Dr. U. Ve. Cāminātaiyar's *"Eṉ Carittiram"* is one of the best works in this genre. Written in an engagingly simple style which, in a scholar of his depth becomes a truly remarkable accomplishment, it is a frank and authentic account of an eventful life; its value gets further reinforced by his vivid accounts of the great men whom he met and of the great *Caiva maṭams* of Tamil Nadu in their heyday.

Another great autobiography is that of the poet Nāmakkal Rāmaliṅkam Piḷḷai. It is even more gripping than Dr.Aiyar's That a renowned poet could write such engaging prose is itself an unusual phenomenon. There are passages in it which read like a novel; for instance, the poet describes his adventures in the North West Frontier

Province of the India of pre-independence days in the company of an intrepid and resourceful friend P. V. Māṇikkavēlu Nāyakkar; how they fell among the Pathans of the frontier and almost lost their lives and how they were saved by the courage and resourcefulness of Nāyakkar read like a top-class novel of adventure.

There are good works of this genre written by the great patriot Va. U. Citamparam Piḷḷai and by Kaṇṇatācan, the poet. Jeyakāntan̲ has written more than one work of an autobiographical nature; his writings possess depth and are always worth perusing.

A most remarkable work of an autobiographical nature is the "*Nāṭaka mēṭai nin̲aivukaḷ* in six volumes by Pammal Campanta Mutaliyar. With the dexterous ease born of half a century of writing, with wit and warmth and understanding, Mutaliyār presents the story of the development of the Tamil stage as he knew it (and he knew the Tamil stage most intimately) making the work not only extremely interesting to read but of surpassing significance to the student of history and of the thespian art.

It is not surprising that we do not have many works of quality in this genre. Indeed, when we reflect on the many qualities and conditions needed for success in this, we should really be surprised that there are this many composed. For, a successful autobiographer should have led a full, varied and interesting life and should have cultivated the art of writing. Most men of business, scientists, film people and politicians cannot write, though they may have something to write about. Autobiographies must be frank and candid narratives; most people have a number of things which they would rather hold back from the general public. Some successful men do not wish to refer to their humble beginnings. (On the other side of the medal some brag about the extreme privations they have had to suffer while young and are willing to embroider the sufferings; it was said of Lyndon Johnson that the distance he had to walk from

home to school increased by a mile every year, in his later years). It is very difficult to come across the kind of frankness and adherence to truth which we see in the best works in this genre. Dr. Aiyar's narrates the incident in his younger days when he was accused of theft of a valuable jewel; Nāmakkal kaviñar describes in pitiless detail how obdurately unsympathetic he was to his first wife for some time till he realised her wonderful nature. Such candidness is rare; and, for this reason, quality autobiographies are rare to find.

TRAVELOGUES

It is possible to trace passages descriptive of places visited and of experiences undergone, in old Tamil literature. These are in verse form and the places visited are in Tamil Nadu itself. It is a pity that Tamils who were seafarers do not have any travelogues of the earlier epochs; it is quite possible that only traders went abroad and they did not or could not write about their experiences. There was clearly no Ibu Batuta or Fahien or Hieun Tsang or Marco Polo among the ancient Tamils. This shortcoming is not restricted to the Tamils, it is really an Indian national shortcoming. Gujaratis and Marwaris have been very enterprising but perhaps all they ever wrote were profit and loss accounts and the world is the loser thereby.

The first definitive travelogues in Tamil were in verse form; it is remarkable that the poets selected popular rural metres like *kummi* and *cintu* for this genre. We have a number of them involving descriptions of the pilgrims journey to Vēḷaṅkaṇṇi, Nagorė and Mylapore and of train journeys in Karnataka. The work describing the author's pilgrimage to Kasi written in 1832 by Enukula Vīrācāmi Iyer must be regarded as the pioneer in this genre in prose. The *Yāttiraikkummi* of V. Rāyappier (1873) is a remarkable work presenting the author's experiences in north India, Italy and France. There are a few descriptions of train journeys dating back to the last years

of the 19th century and the early years of this century which are worth noting here. There are also travelogues describing journeys by ship and aeroplane.

The name that strikes most Tamilians when travelogues are discussed is A. K. Ceṭṭiyār. His *'Ulakam Cuṟṟum Tamiḻaṉ* has set the standard for this genre in recent times. Cōmale's *'Amērikkāvaippār'*, Cu. Na. Cokkaliṅkam's *'Cōviyat Nāṭṭiḷ Nāṉ Kaṇṭatum Kēṭṭatum'* and Maṇiyaṉ's long series *'Itayam Pēcukiṟatu'* are popular works in the genre which analyse the social and cultural life of the countries visited.

Cāvi's *Nāṉ Kaṇṭa Nālu Nāṭukaḷ* and Carōciṉi Srī Rām's *'Ciṅkappūrilirintu Caṅkanativarai'* are readable accounts of travel with the freshness of outlook. A. S. George, Kurumpūr Kuppucāmi and R. Makātēveṉ (Tēveṉ) have also composed useful and entertaining works in this field. Travelogues with a strong religious bias have been composed by Paraṇitaraṉ (temples of south India) A. Jo. Aṭaikkalam (Palestine) and Kurcit Pekum Kan (Haj).

Cālai Iḷantiraiyaṉ, Cantōcam, Aruṇ and M. S. Utayamūrtti are others who have penned travelogues in Tamil. Dr. Mu. Va. has written an account of his tour in Sri Lanka in the form of letters - a vogue followed by other writers after him. The work *'Naṭantāy Vāḻi Kāvēri'* represents an innovative effort in this genre. The authors *Ciṭṭi* and Cāṉakirāmaṉ describe the natural scenery and the life of the people on both sides of the Kāvēri river from its source to the point where it mixes with the sea.

The travelogues in Tamil are of very different flavours. Maṇiyaṉ's is a light and superficial treatment while Dr. Mu. Va.'s is scholarly and perhaps too heavy. A. K. Ceṭṭiyar is perhaps the writer who is able to bring the right kind of qualities to this genre. Success in this field clearly needs a certain power of observation, a well-developed sense of proportion (to eschew the trivial and present only

what is of significance) a tolerant attitude which does not condemn practices at variance with those found in the homeland of the writer, a pleasantly light, but not inconsequential, style, a sense of humour and above all, a prevailing love of homo sapiens. This is a pretty formidable list of qualities not likely to be found to exist together, hence the shortage of works of excellence in the genre.

LITERARY CRITICISM - exegetical efforts.

It is proposed to include under this, works of exegetical value where old poetry is rendered in simple prose with adequate explanations pointing to the beauties in the original. Such works are more in number in Tamil than works of pure criticism.

Works of exegesis began to be composed early in the second millennium after Christ. The commentators were profound scholars with a command of the entire field of literature, backed by an accurate knowledge of grammar, poetics and prosody. Their prose itself was so scholarly it has become necessary to explain their commentaries in modern Tamil for the average reader of today.

Out of the large number of commentators, two stand out - Naccin̲ārkkin̲iyar and Atiyarkku Nallar. The former wrote exegetical works on some *Caṅkam* poems while the latter commented on the *Cilappatikāram.* Both have been able to bring out the many beauties of the original. Naccin̲ārkkin̲iyar must have attained to a high degree of scholarship in *Caṅkam* Tamil and with the aid of his profound knowledge of grammar (he has commented on the *Tolkāppiyam)* he has been able to explain many passages in these recondite texts which would have remained incomprehensible to us without his commentary. (Pērāciriyar wrote a commentary on most of *Kur̲untokai* but unfortunately it has been lost, perhaps irretrievably).

Aṭiyārkku Nallār was clearly an outstanding scholar with a mastery of grammar, like other commentators. His distinguishing

feature which sets him apart from the rest is his encyclopaedic knowledge of the fine arts which comes into play when he expounds the passage in *Cilappatikāram* dealing with Mātavi's training in dance and music and her fateful concert that was to ensnare Kōvalan̲. He refers to works on fine arts which are not available today; he actually quotes from a work of dramaturgy, the *Ceyir̲r̲iyam* which is no longer available to us.

The vogue set up by these masters was avidly followed by a host of writers who commented on even mediocre works; there must have been a scramble for works to comment upon by scholars with no creative gifts who looked upon this form of writing as a ticket to immortality. When the works on which commentaries were composed proved superficial, the learned commentators began to see meanings quite unintended by the author; far-fetched interpretations became the order of the day. At best these commentaries cannot be graded as literature; they serve only as competent guides in a new, unfamiliar territory; at worst they deteriorated into school room companions, compiled to help the young struggling scholar out of his problem.

The tradition of composing commentaries has been more or less discontinued; but books are written giving word-for-word meanings followed by a short passage giving the overall significance. These are largely intended for students doing specialist work in Tamil. For the general reader, scholars have been writing books on classical poetry with long explanations with examples drawn from the contemporary world; these have been popular with the cultivated section of the people who have developed a certain love and knowledge of this recondite literature without acquiring any worthwhile basic understanding of grammar and prosody.

The most noteworthy authors who harnessed this medium to propagate classical poetry are Ki. Vā. Jakannātan̲ and Mu. Varatarācan̲ār, known as Ki. Vā. Ja. and Mu. Va. respectively. To

start with, they had attained a high degree of scholarship in Tamil; Ki. Vā. Ja. served a long period of apprenticeship under the doyen of Tamil letters, Dr. U. Vē. Cāminātaıyar and absorbed a great deal of detailed knowledge not only about the main works but even what can be described as the bylanes of literature. Mu. Va. studied Tamil in the university and attained to a high degree of mastery of the language and its literature.

Ki. Vā. Ja. wrote books of an exegetical nature on the *Cankam* anthologies and on the devotional works on Lord Murukaṉ. He even wrote a work on *Tolkāppiyam* for the popular reader. His writings in this field became very popular and were responsible for a section of the Tamil reading public getting interested in the classical literature in Tamil. He commanded an attractive and easy-to-comprehend style which lighted up the recondite passages and made the average reader appreciate the finer points.

Mu. Va. too wrote similar works of exegesis expounding *Cankam* lyrics in simple prose. Whatever he wrote was limpid and easy to follow and he along with Ki. Vā. Ja. should be accorded the credit for bringing the two thousand year old classics to the common man. Their influence was such that periodicals started setting apart two to three pages in their issures for the exegesis of Tamil classics. T. K. C. and P. Srī. wrote a long series of articles expounding the beauties of Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam.* But this was a short-lived affair and one scarcely notices and literary flavour in today's Tamil Periodicals.

The success of these two scholars has stimulated a number of writers to produce books on the classics; they are of widely varying merit. Kampaṉ has staged a significant come-back with literary associations solely devoted to a study and discussion of his *Rāmāyaṇam*, numbering over fifty, contributing significantly to a regular renaissance. While this is most welcome, it is less heartening to note the upsurge of a Kampaṉ cult whose votaries run down all other works,

their views obviously based on a total ignorance of them. A large number of books have been written on various aspects of Kampaṉ's immortal classic seeking not only to elucidate his recondite verse but to discuss and assess it critically.

One of the earliest writers in the field was Iḷavaḷakaṉār who had attained to an amazingly vast and profound scholarship in Tamil. His work in providing a popular version of *Caṅkam* poetry could fulfil the purpose only to a limited extent as his style of writing is not such as to appeal to an average reader. It was not critical in its approach but wholly exegetical. Among those who have written critical works on *Caṅkam* literature can be mentioned Na. Mu. Vēṅkaṭacāmi Nāṭṭār, Vēṅkaṭarāculu Reṭṭiyār, Cōmacuntara Pārati, S. Vaiyāpurip Piḷḷai, K. Kailācapati, Mu. Varatarācaṉār, N. Cañcīvi, Kōtaṇṭapāṇip Piḷḷai and the present writer. Cōmacuntara Pārati had an original mind that refused to accept anything merely because it has been in the field for a long time, unless it appealed to him rationally or aesthetically. His essays are very thought-provoking and some of the questions he has raised in them have not been satisfactorily replied even today. Kōtaṇṭapāṇip piḷḷai has written a work of a critical nature on *Neṭunalvāṭai* which is readable and is indicative of the author's deep study of the *Caṅkam* long poem. Mu. Varatarācaṉār's approach is emotional and not analytical and one does not get new concepts and perspectives very often in his critical works. N. Cañcīvi's is the viewpoint of an intelligent reader with a certain gift for critical assessment.

Critical writing - Caṅkam works

Rev. Xavier Taṉināyakam and other writers have tried to apply some western concepts of aesthetics to Tamil *Caṅkam* literature. Dr. Rāma Periyakaruppaṉ (Tamiḻaṇṇal) has done commendable work in applying ideas from Sanskrit aesthetics to *Caṅkam* literature. He rightly points on how the *Caṅkam* poets excelled in suggestive poetry; while the Sanskritists went ahead theorising about suggestion

(tuvani) Tamil aesthetics has remained static with no significant advance after the flying start given by Tolkāppiyar. It would be sadly wrong and unfair to assert that Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry is lacking in suggestion; it is only that the Tamil was not as prone to theorising about poetry as his Sanskrit cousin.

Maraimalai aṭikaḷ was a colossus in the field of Tamil letters. His critical studies attained a depth not to be seen in similar works of most Tamil scholars, on account, partly, of his very clear analytical faculty and mainly because he had studied the great classics in Sanskrit and English. He was one of the earliest writers in Tamil to emphasise the influence of the social conditions of the time on the creative writer; and he urged that, in order to understand fully the mental processes, the strength and weaknesses, the pressures operating ,even the prejudices which together make up a poet's personality, one has to study the times in which he lived and the social milieu in which he moved. His studies on *Paṭṭiṉappālai* and *Mullaippāṭṭu* are valuable contributions to the meagre store of critical studies in Tamil. Aṭikaḷ must rightfully be regarded as the pioneer of comparative criticism in Tamil.

Vēṅkaṭarāculu Reṭṭiyār and Vēṅkaṭacāmi Nāṭṭār were profound scholars who looked at Tamil literature through the limited viewpoint of the literary theory available in the land. Their works are still valuable for the depth of the scholarship behind them and the many subtle nuances they have been able to uncover in our oldest poetry.

The present writer has been deeply involved with *Caṅkam* studies for nearly forty-five years and has authored a number of books of criticism on *Caṅkam* literature. As a crilic of *Caṅkam* literature, he is not hidebound by the conservatism that plagues some scholars into a timid acceptance of past commentators' views; but he is fully alive to the need to live by those wise conventions set forth so lucidly in the *Tolkāppiyam* .

One of his early books on *Caṅkam* is really an effort to introduce a new concept to Tamil aesthetics. Keats had said in a letter to a friend that poetry should please by a fine excess. He did not elaborate on this nor has this attracted the attention of western writers on criticism to any extent. The present writer understood this to refer chiefly to the delineation of sentiments and proceeded to elaborate the concept into a full fledged theory where the lower and the upper limits to the sentiment were required to be fixed by each poet according to his lights. He found that the level of delineation of sentiment in creative literature should be higher than that we meet with in comparable life situations but should not exceed a ceiling suggested by the artistic sensibilities of each creator. The reasons why these should be so have been analysed in great detail and examples have been provided for each from *Caṅkam* love lyrics. This theory is applicable to all literature, indeed to all art and he expects other writers to apply it to Kampa<u>n</u>, for instance and to other classics in due time. Meanwhile with his well-known preference for *Caṅkam* poetry he has shown how the *Caṅkam* poets have observed these limits in the most natural fashion. His first book on this entitled "*Caṅkappāṭṭil poṅkum uṇarcci*" was in Tamil; he has followed it up with a translation in English entitled "Fine excess of literary sentiment".

In another book in Tamil entitled "*Caṅkappāṭṭil putiya pārvai*" he has shown how four rather new concepts have a natural application in *Caṅkam* poetry. The concepts are: symbolism, a character's version in preference to the poet's, the transfer of experience as the main function of poetry and the significance of a fine excess of sentiment in poetry. Examples have been culled from *Akanā<u>n</u>ū<u>r</u>u* which, perhaps on account of the length of the verses in it has received less attention from writers than the other love anthologies.

The second of the four concepts referred to above is so much a characteristic of *Caṅkam* love lyrics and so vital a literary

principle that he decided to research it more deeply and came out with a book in English which he called "Focus on the speaker". Here, for the first time in Tamil aesthetics (perhaps for the first time anywhere, for that matter) he examines the many reasons why a character's version of an episode is more aesthetically effective than a poet's; he substantiates his analysis everywhere with Cankam love lyrics rendered by him into English verse.

We have everywhere referred to the literary conventions by which *Caṅkam* poetry is bound. The present writer has examined them in a book in English entitled, "Convention and Creativity in *Caṅkam* Love Lyrics" posing two question to himself and finding answers to them. The first question is "Did the *Caṅkam* love poets adhere to these conventions?" and the second is "Did they lose any part of their creativity in doing so?". He found that these poets did observe and honour these conventions to a remarkable extent. He also found that though this being bound by conventions curbs creativity in most cases, it has not had that effect in the case of *Caṅkam* poets. He also found that the reasons for this rather unique situation are the very reasonable and indeed actively helpful nature of the conventions and, of course, the superior poetic calibre of the *Caṅkam* masters.

In two other works of his in Tamil which cover the entire gamut of Tamil literature, he has quoted liberally from *Caṅkam* literature too. The first is entitled *"Pārati kaṇṭa kavitait talaivi"* where he deduces eight aesthetic principles from the well-known poem of Pārati, *"Kavitait talaivi"* and illustrates them with examples from Tamil poetry from the Cankam era to the present day.

The second is entitled *"Tamiḻk Kaviñaṉ Tērtiraṉ*; it examines, again for the first time, the faculty of selectivity displayed by Tamil poets at all stages, from the choosing of the material of his poem, through the sentiment, the characters and the objects of description to the diction, the metre, the figures of speech and the symbols to

be used. Here too, he has used *Caṅkam* lyrics to advantage for illustrating his concepts though one finds in it verses from all representative poems inclusive of the work of living authors. The book studies the probable criteria adopted by the poet in these exercises of his selectivity so as to delve into the personality of the poet which still remains a dark corner, beside which the darkest continent on the earth would look quite well charted.

A general survey of *Caṅkam* criticisms

Almost every literary writer in Tamil except the fanatically exclusive Kampaṉ scholars has written on *Caṅkam* literature. But most of this is more exegetical than critical. It is customary for writers to select a few stanzas from *Caṅkam* and write essays on them with more or less distinction. There is little that is new or innovative in most of them. The same is seen in the field of platform speaking too. Many of the famed speakers have developed a very attractive style of speaking spiced with humour not always relevant to the context; they take up a few verses from *Kuṟuntokai* or *Naṟṟiṇai* and can spend an interesting though not a very profitable hour, expatiating on them.

One of the difficulties all these writers and speakers suffer from is the lack of grasp of the basic literary conventions of the *Caṅkam* Age. One such convention is that all love lyrics are presented as the version of a character. Much confusion and misinterpretation results from a failure to realise that what a love-lorn youth or an anxiety - ridden foster mother says is blatantly untrue. This is dramatically demonstrated in the age-long misconstruing of the second verse of the *Kuṟuntokai* dealing with the bonquet in the hair of girls. This is not the only verse that has suffered at the hands of interpreters. In many cases, the meaning that is construed by even such an astute and painstaking scholar as Cāminātaiyar is obviously too bland to be correct; the significance is much deeper and has been

missed. There are verses in the love anthologies where the friend of the girl identifies herself so much with the girl that she uses "I" where she should say 'you'; this has given rise to frightful misinterpretation that the friend herself is in love with the hero, which is pure heresy, according to *Caṅkam* conventions.

There are brilliant westerners like Kamil Zvelebil and George L. Hart who have done a great deal of work on *Caṅkam* literature. Their most valuable contribution has resulted from the very unusual angle from which they view Tamil poetry. Such freshness of viewpoint has been noticeably absent in local critics and this is a very serious shortcoming that has stood in the way of the development of a satisfactory critical apparatus. But sometimes these western scholars go wrong mostly on account of their inadequate grasp of Tamil and Indian beliefs. A notable instance is where Zvelebil interprets a verse of *Kuṟuntokai(119)* . The analogy given in it is merely to emphasise the annoyance caused to the youth by the obdurate girl with whom he is hopelessly in love. She is small and delicate and seemingly so very innocent; but like the young one of a variety of serpent that has stripes on its body and looks very handsome causing annoyance to the big tusker, she is a source of painful anxiety to the robust, big-built hero. But Zvelebil projects the analogy beyond the point of propriety to urge that the snake and the elephant are in love! Such inter-species love is just not admitted to exist, in Indian thinking and the learned scholar's interpretation will strike Indian readers as amusing.

In his work "*Literary conventions in Akam poetry*", a work of penetrating perception, Dr. Zvelebil compares the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* with the anthologies on love and quotes with approval J. R. Marr's statement that "the former is arranged according to a symmetrical structure in marked contrast to the relatively haphazard way in which the poems on any given *tiṇai* follow one another". Both these

western scholars clearly have missed the point that while *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* was a commissioned work where five poets were allotted a hundred stanzas each on one of the five *tiṇais*, the other three works are anthologies selected by men of great literary judgment from out of perhaps thousands of stanzas. This difference accounts for the glaring difference in the literary levels attained by the two kinds of works. This point has already been discussed in Chapter 2 and needs no elaboration except that is a little surprising that two critics of the brilliance of Dr. Zvelebil and Dr.Marr have missed this rather obvious fact.

While one set of critics (mostly from the west) suffers from the difficulty arising from an inadequate grasp of Tamil traditions and beliefs, Indian critics suffer from an inability to free themselves from the shackles of the commentators. Dr. Cāminātiyar's interpretation of verse 235 of *Kuṟuntokai* suffers from a wrong interpretation of the word *"ōmpumati"*. He understands it to mean "may you protect!" It really means "please avoid". The poem presented in the version of the youth is a prayer to the cold north wind to avoid blowing over the girl's village; he himself though troubled by it during the separation, is able to bear it but is very doubtful if she, a delicately nurtured girl, will be able to bear it. It is a straight request to the cold wind to skirt her village as it blows on; there is no way the cold wind can protect her. Unfortunately this interpretation has been accepted by A. K. Ramanujan and used in his outstanding work of trans-composition *"The Interior Landscape"*.

Similarly Aiyar's interpretation of verses 136 and 204, both by Miḷaipperuṅ kantaṉ, appears to miss their spirit by rather a big margin. These are two most unusual verses recording the very philosophy of love and reveal the calibre of the author not only as a creative poet but as a daringly innovative thinker. In 136, the hero declares to his friend the characteristic of love which does not, as is popularly believed, start in a small way and grow into a conflagration. It resides as a potential inside the personality of the lover

and the loved and bursts out in all its fullness the moment the object of the love is seen. Aiyar has laid the entire emphasis on the potential residing in the lovers and thinks that is all the message of the poem. The third line throws a very clear hint about the intention of the poet: "love does not start as a trickle and wax big, nor does it weaken at a later stage". The entire capacity for love that a person has bursts out all at once like a dam that is shattered by too great an influx of flood waters. The analogy confirms this beyond all possible doubt. We often hear reports that an elephant which had been most affectionate towards its keeper suddenly turned on him and killed him. The rut of an elephant does not come on by stages; it reveals itself suddenly with full force when least suspected.

Verse 204, also from this same gifted philosopher of love talks of another aspect of love. This is presented as the version of the friend admonishing the hero. Clearly the hero is unhappy at not being able to meet the girl and have physical union with her. The friend tells him that love is far too subtle a thing for it to depend on physical union for its sustenance. It is, in fact, a rare mental state that gives pleasure whenever one's consciousness is focussed on it. The analogy, again confirms this interpretation. The cow has been described as old and hence its capacity to pluck the grass from the hard ground must be assumed to have vanished. But still, despite the fact that it is unable to obtain physical enjoyment from the act, it perseveres in licking the grass since that brings to its mind its past experiences, while young, of having chewed and tasted the juicy grass and that remembrance makes it happy. Love is very similar, says that poet through the wise words of the friend; it brings pleasure through the recapitulation of the accumulated memories of past experiences. Aiyar's interpretation misses the subtle message of the poem.

Verse 3 of *Kuṟuntokai* is one of very deep import but as interpreted by Dr. Aiyar looks quite ordinary and unimpressive. As interpreted, it only presents the girl's high estimate of heṛ love for

the young man, comparing it for size to the earth, for the elevation to the heavens and for the depth to the sea. The subtle suggestion conveyed by the second half of this poem (in fact it is slightly more than half) is wholly missed. The girl refers to the land of her lover where the bees build up a hive full of unifloral honey only from the *kuṟiñci* flower. The *kuṟiñci* blooms only once in twelve years and after ensuring the preservation of the species through such efflorescence, it dies. The point of the reference is that just as this species of bees patiently waits for the efflorescence of the *kuṟiñci* and manufactures its unique honey only from its flowers, here is that rare and noble and elevated kind of love that can wait for its requital patiently through long periods, that shuns like the plague all thought of having a quick satisfaction from a different source. If in a small poem of four lines, this reference to the country of the youth occupies more than half of the entire piece, it has to yield a very significant *ulluṟai uvamam* suggested comparison) which, on closer examination, it does.

It is a pity that very fine poems which have a world of suggestion in them and consequent literary delight to offer are interpreted superficially in the manner indicated, reducing them to mediocrity. Cāminatāiyar's services in bringing out the *Caṅkam* classics in superlative editions must be remembered with gratitude by all Tamil lovers. He was a pioneer and his mistakes and failings are those that beset all pioneers. This only indicates the vital necessity of fresh minds applying themselves to this exquisite poetry, bearing in mind the literary conventions by which it is bound, and prepared to disagree with the views of the most prestigious names in the field, urged only by the burning desire to unravel the full beauty of this matchless inheritance we have been bequeathed. A great deal of innovative criticism has to be done on *Caṅkam* literature by persons of the right attitude of mind who will steer clear of the two evils, the scylla of too conservative an attitude shunning all imaginative

innovation on the right and the Charybdis, on the left, of too recklessly bold a spirit that sets at nought the very wise literary and social conventions by which that literature is bound.

If names of critics have been mentioned, it is not with a view to belittle their work - which is of an outstanding quality. The only purpose is to focus the attention of the workers in the field on the vast territory yet to be covered. The feeling of smug complacency that we notice among most scholars is wholly unjustified; a correct assessment of the work done would reveal that a valuable literature which has some unique features not found elsewhere has been rediscovered, salvaged from total destruction and the first tentative efforts at comprehending it in the way it is meant to be have been made. Aiyar and the scholars of his generation have done their best. Now, it is upto this generation to go deeper into this exquisite literature and set up a critical study of it with a due feeling of humility born of the realisation that much of it is yet to be understood. It would help if literary associations of the type of Kampaṉ Kaḻakams are launched and run by devout *Caṅkam* lovers. The Government has to play a big part in developing countries in fields like this where private munificence is notably absent.

Critical works On Jain Kāppiyams

From *Caṅkam* literature, if we come down to the world of the Jain and Buddhist *kāppiyams*, we find that except *Cilappatikāram*, the other works have not received much attention from critics. *Cilappatikāram* is the best of them all, as we have seen, it is, in fact, one of the great poems of the world and it is not surprising that critics have devoted some attention to it. The surprise is that so little attention has been paid to it.

The first name that comes to the mind when the great epic poem is mentioned is Te. Po. Mīṉāṭcicuntaraṉār. His *"Kāṉalvari"* deals only with a small part of the *kāppiyam*, with the passage

which marks the turning point of the whole story. But its consistent brilliance and the daringly innovative approach of the author mark it out as a work of extraordinary calibre. This passage is of outstanding beauty and in it, Iḷaṅkō recreates the half-forgotten phantasy land of the *Caṅkam* lyrics. The gifted critic sees in the many suggestive metaphors with which it is replete, a prior indication of the things to come later on in the poem. T. N. Cēcācalam, a man of genius who, perhaps was born a century too soon, had hinted earlier in his *"Kalānilaiyam"*, a periodical, that there is much more in the *kanalvari* than meets the eye. But full credit should go to the polymath Mīṉāṭcicuntaraṉār for having worked out its conundrums in so fascinating a manner. He knew Sanskrit and English very well, an equipment rarely met with in the Tamil world of today; he had an original, innovative mind that was ceaselessly questioning, probing, assessing and discovering. It is a pity he did not or could not devote more time to this impoverished world of literary criticism.

Ma. Po. Civañāṉam universally known as Ma. Po. Ci. is so much identified with *Cilappatikāram* that he is affectionately known as ' Cilampuc Celvar'. He is a great speaker on the platform and it is this gift that has made his name so well known all through the land. He knows little English and no Sanskrit and it is doubtful if he has read the other great classics in Tamil deeply enough. These shortcomings have seriously hampered his contribution as a critic; like T. K. C., he is more an enthusiast who can infect his listeners with a love of the poem which appeals to him. This, of course, is an important contribution but it is not a critic's work. It must be said to his credit that many thousands of men and women have drunk deeply of the *Cilappatikāram* fountain impelled purely by the golden voice of the great orator.

One such was N. Cañcivi whose work *Cilappatikāra Viruntu* is a good contribution to the sparse critical literature on the great *kāppiyam*. With his sharp mind and the facile style of expression he could

command, he has written quite a readable critique of the great classic. In some places he can be found to take an original stand and present a fresh viewpoint not given to many others who put on the critic's mantle. It is, however, noticeable that at the turning point of the story when the *kāṉalvari* lines are sung, Cañcīvi does not see the ominous significance of the many utterances employing concealed metaphors. Similarly on the occasion when the Cēra king hears the story for the first time from Cāttaṉār and makes a number of significant statements on how "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," the critic fails to note how the king is most forcibly struck by the travails of his compeer, the Pāṇṭiya monarch. The reader of the book is likely to be a little bored by the constant iteration of patriotism made in it; in fact most occasions in the epic poem are interpreted by the critic as expressive of the patriotic impulse - which, obviously, is not true.

S. Ramakrishnan has an original mind well stocked with the great works in English and his speeches and writings have a flavour that is unusual and interesting. His critical work on *Cilappatikaram* is a valuable addition to the critical literature on the poem. His special forte is comparative literature.

Critical work on the great *Cintāmaṇi* is yet to begin. Cuntaramūrtti's work is more exegetical. If even *Cintāmaṇi* can be neglected, what of works like *Cūḷāmaṇi* and *Peruṅkatai?* These two, as already noticed, are good literary works that need to be studied critically by men and women of adequate training and the right mental attitude. The fact that they were not enthroned by our forebears among the five great epic poems need not prejudice students of these two worthwhile works which, clearly, did not receive the adulation they should.

A number of books have been written on the hymnal literature but none can be called truly critical. These are mostly written by pious people for others of the same ilk; and criticism, involving both favourable and adverse comment is unlikely to be welcomed by

these. These books are, as a consequence, full of a fulsome adulation, providing detailed comments on simple passages and seeing beauties everywhere. Works like those of P. Srī. and Cuvāmi Citpavāṉantā are exceptionally good but only exegeses. The present as writer has had occasions to review books on *Tiruvācakam* and he was struck by the wholly uncritical attitude of the authors whose tributes become quickly cloying even to the average reader. Most Tamil (in fact, most Indian) writers do not offer any adverse comment even on literary works; one cannot expect adverse criticism on hymnal literature which, though not revealed by God, is still too sacred to be critically assessed.

Criticism On Kamparāmāyaṇam

Now we can take up a review of the critical and exegetical literature on Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam*. The present writer is happy to move over to this territory from the sparsely populated land of epic criticism for he finds himself among people and the land is fertile. If we can think of revolutions in the field of writing, we can call this era as one where a real revolution is happening before our eyes. Thanks mainly to the efforts of Ca. Kaṇēcaṉ and T. K. C. and popular periodicals like *Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ* and *Kalki*, a fervour has been engendered in the masses in favour of Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam*. While the intelligentsia have been attracted to this immortal classic through the books of critics and magazine articles and public lectures, the masses have found it pleasing through the ubiquitous *paṭṭi maṉṟams*, the Tamil version of debating sessions, where humorous thrusts and repartees draw more applause than subtle reasoning and suggested metaphor.

When we think of Kampaṉ's great classic, the first name that comes to the mind is that of Va. Vē. Cu. Aiyar. It was Va. Vē. Cu. Aiyar who first showed how western ideas of criticism could be applied sensibly to Tamil literature in such a way its beauty can stand more fully revealed. He set up the concept of "architectonics"

as the base of his criticism, taking it form the west, rather than use the concept of *raca* of the Sanskritists. Basing his study on this, Aiyar examines Kampa<u>n</u>'s *Rāmāyaṇam*, canto by canto to understand how each contributes to the progress of the story and the unravelling of the character patterns. This kind of study has never been undertaken earlier and even after Aiyar's pioneering effort, little progress has been made in the study of structural relationship of the parts of a work with each other and that of each to the whole.

One of the points which Aiyar brings out as a result of this architectonic approach is the relevance of the *Pālakāṇṭam*. He argues that if the killing of Rāvaṇan is the main theme of the epic, then the real seed (bija) of the story is laid in *Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam* and after that, the story proceeds quite swiftly (for an epic) and logically to the denouement. The *Pālakāṇṭam* thus acts like an introduction to the epic and, considered in the light of an introduction, it is much too long.

In many places Aiyar presents a picture of how other poets (mostly Greek) would have dealt with an episode and arrives at very pertinent results. In his criticism of the *Āraṇiya kāṇṭam* he observes with great insight how episodes like that where Virāṭa figures lend a purāṇic air to this *kāppiyam;* the *kāppiyam* itself could move forward faster without these distracting episodes. Aiyar displays a most commendable sense of proportion and is unafraid to point a critical finger at the weaknesses and distractions and excesses discoverable even in Kampa<u>n</u>'s immortal work.

There is a further merit in Va. Vē. Cu. Aiyar's critique of the epic poem. Writers and speakers who are versed in Sanskrit have often a tendency to rate Vālmīki higher than Kampa<u>n</u>, without even assigning reasons. Aiyar is refreshingly free from such prejudices. He acknowledges the accepted fact that Kampa<u>n</u> based his work on Vālmīki's. The great Riṣi was the brilliant pioneer who gave to the world the *Rāmāyaṇam* and forever put the world under his debt. But

Kampan̲ was an equally brilliant poet - perhaps a greater poet than Valmiki who must be regarded as a faithful, dedicated chronicler rather than as a poet. And Kampan̲ had the work of Vālmīki before him on which to improve, to innovate, to create. And Kampan̲, getting on the shoulders of his predecessor could command a vaster vista than he ever could. Aiyar realised all this and has paid his mead of tribute to the Tamil bard whose portrait he wishes to place in the world's Hall of Fame tenanted by but seven or eight great poets, not more.

M. M. Ismail retired as a chief justice and his legal training is seen to advantage in his writings. His most important contribution is his analysis of Vāli's killing on which a controversy has been raging over millennia. He naturally examines the episode through the eyes of a gifted judge and comes out with the judgement that Rāma cannot be faulted for his slaying Vāli from a concealed position. The learned judge has a commendable scholarship in the *kāppiyam* and the work must be regarded as a distinct contribution to the literature on the classic.

If Ismail looks at the epic poem through the eyes of law, N. V. Nāyuṭu examines it through the viewpoint of a sociologist interested in finding out how societies function. In his work Nāyuṭu has made a brilliant study of the societies as revealed by Vālmīki and Kampan̲, with the help of his enviable command of both Sanskrit and Tamil.

A. Ca.Ñān̲acampantan̲'s recent work is entirely preoccupied with the ethical code. With his usual perspicacity he makes a penetrating study of the system of morals of the Cōḻa country as revealed in Kampan̲'s *kāppiyam*. While it must be admitted that this part of the study is of a high quality, he is not nearly so right when he condemns *Caṅkam* society as given to lechery, solely on the basis of the stanzas on *marutam* where the hero's straying from the path of virtue is balladized. This division of *Caṅkam* love poetry has been misunderstood by many scholars; the present writer is firmly of the

opinion that the ancient Tamil poet with his instinctive sensibility realised the importance of conflict in literature and finding no other factor sharp enough to cause it in the married life of the principal characters he introduced the institution of prostitution only to provide the needed conflict. It is idle to pretend that Kampa_n's society was any purer (or more puritanical) than the *Cankam*. Prostitution is hailed as the world's oldest profession and it has flourished unchecked at all times, in all climes.

And pursuing the same line of argument, the Rāma story involves a married man abducting the wife of another. The evil-doer comes to no good, admittedly; but how this story could act as a counterblast to man's baser instincts is more than what the present writer can understand. The nature and degree of immorality in the *Rāmāyaṇam* are much greater than those displayed in the *marutam* verses of the *Cankam*. The argument of the learned author appears untenable, for these reasons.

It will strike the intelligent reader who has gone through the last four paragraphs that these very learned critics all seem to be interested in aspects other than the purely literary. Ismail's is the legal view while Nāyuṭu's is the social or anthropological view; Ñāṉacampantaṉ looks at the *kāppiyam* from the view-point of the moralist. There is now a school of critics which assess Kampaṉ's magnum opus strictly through a Marxist point of view. The present writer is aware of the high qualifications and the unremitting industry of these scholar-critics. But he hopes he will not be termed an obscurantist if he suggests literary works being primarily examined from the literary point of view.

Credit for viewing Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam* from the literary viewpoint should be shared by Va.Vē.Cu.Aiyar's and Thi.Celva Kēcavarāya Mutaliyār. We have discussed Aiyar's significant contribution earlier. Mutaliyār who was anterior to Iyer must be regarded as the real pioneer of critical studies in Tamil. His work on Kampaṉ called

'Kampanāṭan̲' along with his studies of *Tirukkur̲aḷ* and other works needs to be given greater credit than is vouchsafed to them today, for awakening the interest of Tamilians in a critical study of their own literature.

Mutaliyār, among other things, emphasises the value of biography in criticism; he is very right in deploring the weakness of Indians in the field of biography. We do not know even the basic facts about our greatest creative poets. This weakness perhaps explains in part our poverty in critical literature and the paucity of aesthetic norms or criteria of judgment. Mutaliyār recognised this serious shortcoming in Tamil studies and has written a pungent passage on it. At the same time he issues a needed warning that all western concepts in literary theory will not be applicable to Tamil. It is clearly necessary for critics to develop standards of judgment that would naturally apply to Tamil literature, standards derived from the older Tamil works on poetics, chiefly *Tolkāppiyam*.

TKC - a Critical view

We now have to discuss the work, the personality and the impact on the literary world of a very distinctive person, T.K Citamparanāta Mutaliyār, often referred to in admiration or derision as T.K.C. By the criterion of chronology, he must have been discussed earlier but as the writers talked about till now were critics and TKC is decidedly not of their persuasion, he is being discussed at this point.

TKC was a lawyer by education and a dilettante in his way of living, not having to earn his livelihood through legal practice. He cannot be deemed a scholar in the strictest sense of the word but was well acquainted with some aspects of literature from a very early age. But it was Kampan̲'s *Rāmāyaṇam* that occupied the length and breadth and the depth of his generous personality to the exclusion of all else. He considered (rightly) that Kampan̲ is the greatest of Tamil poets and concluded (not so rightly) that no other Tamil work need be studied.

TKC should be understood more as a connoisseur of literature than a critic. He enjoyed the stanzas of *Rāmāyaṇam* to a greater extent than most lovers of literature do and he was able to infect people around him with the same enthusiasm for them. He insisted on poetry being read aloud to bring out its metric felicity and he taught his many admirers how to read it aloud in grain with the cadence. An admirer has written that TKC was a very good singer who had had good training in singing the *ragas* of Carnatic music and that he would choose the correct *raga* in which to sing each stanza so as to bring out its inner sentiment.

TKC was a very warm-hearted person who could not do anything by halves. He loved Kampa<u>n</u> to distraction and he was a considerate host. Lovers of literature thronged his house to hear him expatiate on the *Rāmāyaṇam*. His infectious enthusiasm, his undoubted talent for presentation ,his ability to hold the attention of a group through his talk and his considerable knowledge of Kampan all combined to make these sessions memorable literary orgies. His lovable nature bound these guests to him through hoops of steel; those who heard him once remained his admirers for life.

TKC was quite certain - to the point of obstinacy - that form and sentiment were all that mattered in a poem. He believed (rightly) that Kampa<u>n</u>'s stanzas have both and (quite wrongly) that *Caṅkam* pieces had neither. By form he meant only the metric structure and by structure he meant only the *viruttam*, not the *āciriyappā*. He could not sing verses in the *āciriyappā* metre, he found the *Caṅkam* diction recondite and he did not have the patience to locate and enjoy the subtle sentiments in *Caṅkam* lyrics. He does not seem to have come across the *Ku<u>r</u>untokai*. He seems to have read a few verses in the *Pu<u>r</u>anā<u>n</u>ū<u>r</u>u* and jumped to the conclusion that there is no form and no sentiment in *Caṅkam* poetry. And he stuck to this conclusion to the last. The result was a double tragedy, It was a personal

tragedy as, a person of his aesthetic potential failed totally to derive any enjoyment out of the exquisite *Caṅkam* literature. It was also a tragedy of much wider dimensions going far beyond his individual self and one that continues even today in small measure. For, his admirers and followers who bear towards him the veneration of votaries to their cult leader are very much disinclined to taste *Caṅkam* poetry, being lulled into a complacence that Kampaṉ is the only Tamil that need be read.

Enjoyment of poetry is certainly a subjective experience. But TKC would stress the subjective factor beyond the point of propriety and based purely on his own inadequate aesthetic standards would reject many of Kampaṉ's stanzas as spurious and correct others as his heart dictated. This shortcoming of his earned for him the enmity of a large number of true Kampaṉ lovers; his highly whimsical ideas of sant earned for him the ridicule of Tamil scholars.

To sum up, TKC was at the vanguard of a powerful movement which popularised Kampaṉ's *Rāmāyaṇam*. Those who listened to his talk became permanant converts to literary dilettantism. He did not, however, lay down any cogent standards of criteria by which literature could be savoured. He was not a critic or aesthete, he was only a connoisseur who could enjoy poetry. The literary influence of such people waxes high while they live but wanes off to the vanishing point after their death. It has little to do with the emotional hold he still has over his admirers.

Other workers in the Kampaṉ field

A Kampaṉ scholar who did a great deal to spread among the Tamils an awareness of his matchless poetry without the whimsicalities of TKC was P.Srī. Acārya, known universally as P.Srī. He wrote serials in the Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ which were-long -sustained and widely popular on the *Rāmāyaṇam* and later on, on the *Tivviyap Pirapantam* and *Periyapurāṇam*. Those were the days when the

popular periodicals considered it necessary and commercially viable to publish articles on the classics as a regular measure; they have given up the practice altogether now, indicating that such matter is no longer popular with the Tamil reading public. P.Sri. commanded a brighter style than TKC and his interpretation was lucid and apt. He lived upto a ripe old age without either honours or riches coming to him. His work was more exegetical than critical.

A great admirer of Kampaṉ who played a significant part in the propagation of the Kampaṉ cult was Professor A. Srinivasaraghavan. He came to Kampaṉ with an equipment extremely rare to find in Tamil Nadu; he was a brilliant professor of English and had acquired a thorough knowledge of western critical methods before he was converted as a Kampan dilettante. His influence was exercised more through the informal chats in his house and through public lectures; he did not write much. His students hold him in great esteem. No particular viewpoint or critical method can be identified with him.

A short note on the contribution of Cā. Kaṇēcaṉ to the spread of the Kampaṉ cult may not be out of place here. He was a great admirer of Kampaṉ to whose service he dedicated his entire life. This kind of total dedication is not usually met with in the literary field; it is most often seen in religion where people renounce material life to serve religion on a full-time basis. He ran the Kampaṉ Kaḻakam of Kāraikkuṭi as a benevolent dictator for decades till his death; and he succeeded in making Kampaṉ a house-hold name. The Kampaṉ festival he organised annually became the most important literary event of Tamil Nadu for the year. The fact that more than fifty Kampaṉ Kaḻakams have been formed all over the Tamil world is a tribute to Kaṇēcaṉ's lasting influence in the field. He was a superb organiser; his platform speaking and writing are of much lower calibre. Kaṇēcaṉ must be given the mantle of the greatest Kampaṉ evangelist there has ever been.

It is said that every speaker who gets on the platform in the Kampan̲ festivals all over the Tamil land is dependent on the commentary on Kampan̲'s *Rāmāyaṇam* by Vai. Mu.Kōpālakiruṣṇa māccāriyar. He belonged very much to the old school of Tamil scholarship which believed in a thorough mastery of grammar and in acquiring at least a working knowledge of Sanskrit. He was the devoted student of his own elder brother Vai.Mu.Caṭakōpa Rāmān̲ucāccāriyar, a highly reputed scholar of late nineteenth century. His commentary of the *Rāmāyaṇam* is the basis of other exegetical works published in recent times by universities and other agencies. It is wholly exegetical in purpose and execution.

The Periyapurāṇam

The next important work we have to consider from the viewpoint of critical studies done on it is the *Periyapurāṇam.* Quite expectedly it has received uncritical adulation from pious writers and much exegetical work has been done on it from this viewpoint. P.Srī' s work on *Periyapurāṇam* which had the effect of bringing it to the notice of the magazine-reader has already been referred to. Saiva organisations arrange for lectures on this as a regular programme. The Tamil must surely be the most avid lecture-listener in the world. Since he reads very little, one must be thankful that he at least listens to lectures. For, quite a few platform-speakers are able to pass on some aesthetic concepts during the course of their lectures and they should be thanked for this service to the Tamils since they (the latter) get aesthetic nutriments through no other source.

The most notable critical personality that has made a memorable impact on the Periyapurāṇam studies is A.Ca. Ñān̲acampantan̲. He was appointed for a two year period to the chair of *Periyapurāṇam* in the Philosophy Centre at Kāñcipuram, a unit of the Tamil University, Tañcāvūr. Long before this he had made a name for himself as a speaker on this classic; indeed it was an heirloom for his from

hihim father who was a reputed scholar and speaker on this great work. But he utilised this appointment to delve deep into it and he has written a big-sized volume presenting the results of his research, entitled *"Periyapurāṇa Āyvu"*.

At the outset if should be stated that Ñāṉacampantaṉ has not brought a literary critic's viewpoint to it. He has been losing interest in the literary and aesthetic aspect of literature over the decades. From the position wherefrom he composed the *Ilakkiyakkalai "Akamum Puṟamum"* he has moved away to an exclusive contemplation of the social, ethical and spiritual aspects of Tamil works. But despite this, the work is of major importance as one from the pen of a very reputed scholar who is unafraid to think independently and arrive at conclusion which may be at variance with the accepted beliefs. And the basic thesis of the book which explains known phenomena in Tamil social history more satisfactorily than others ruling the field is of surpassing importance to every one interested in Tamil Nadu, its society its literature and its religious heritage.

The author puts a question to himself and seeks and finds an answer to it in the pages of the *Periyapurāṇam*. The question is this: Brahmins believe in the primacy of the Vedic forms of worship through which they worship Vedic gods like Intiraṉ, Varuṇaṉ and Akṉi. How did it come to pass that Ñāṉacampantar, the foremost of the Saiva apostles who was a Brahmin whose father performed a sacrifice for which his illustrious son furnished the funds obtained through the grace of Lord Siva, raised the cult of Siva to a pinnacle and taught people the virtue of visiting Siva temples and worshipping the Lord enshrined there in the form of a *liṅkam?*

To answer this question the researcher investigates the verses of the *Periyapurāṇam* and the psalms of the *nāyaṉmār* besides other sources of information like the Vedas and the *Agamas* and some copperplate inscriptions, too. He arrives at the conclusion that Brahmins of the *kaundinya gotra* to which Ñāṉacampantar belongs

should have been cut off from the main group of north India Brahmins belonging to other *gotras*. He assumes that the Brahmins of the *kaundinya gotra* should have been natives of the Tamil land and not of north India as the others were. Brahmins of the other *gotras* came later in numbers to the Tamil land on the invitation of (Pallava) kings and settled down here. But Ñāṉacampantar's clansmen were natives of the Tamil land, they spoke Tamil; and they were not as deeply under the influence of the Vedic Brahmins as the others undoubtedly were.

But, still the other Brahmins and even men of the *kaundinya gotra* were performing Vedic sacrifices till Ñāṉacampantar came along. In fact there is s verse in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* (verse No.166) which speaks of a Brahmin called Viṇṇantāyaṉ performing a sacrifice to Siva and not to the Vedic gods. Surprisingly this sacrificer belonged to the same *Gotra, Kaundinya*, to which Ñāṉacampantar too belonged.

Ñāṉacampantar developed an overwhelming devotion for Lord Siva in the tradition of Kāraikkāl ammaiyār and being a poet in Tamil, he sang melodious and devout hymns in praise of Siva as enshrined in the temples of Tamil Nadu. This caught on and soon there was a regular recognisable movement favouring Siva worship and temple-visiting. Perhaps some brahmins of the other clans also joined in. But the leaders of the sacrificial school of rituals saw a fundamental threat to their age-old beliefs in Ñāṉacampantar's movement and they opposed it with all their strength. But they had to yield at last, probably because the mass movement was too strong for them, Ñāṉacampantar's personality was too attractive and the support of crowned heads had been secured by him.

A.Ca.Ña., the author, develops the theme convincingly with a wealth of references. With his deep scholarship in *Periyapurāṇam* and other works of a cognate nature and with a certain amount of advice and guidance from friends possessing knowledge of Vedas

and Sanskrit Agamas, the researcher has brought out a wealth of interesting conclusions; they need further research by scholars in view of the light it may shed on the state of Siva worship and of religious practices in general in the first few centuries of the Christian era in the Tamil land.

For instance he traces the origins of Siva worship from pre-*Cankam* days in four stages upto Kāraikkāl ammaiyār who served as the role-model for Ñāṉacampantar. He concludes that Siva worship travelled to the North from Tamil Nadu and influenced the later vedas to such an extent the Vedic Rudra got transformed to Civa.

A.C.Ña.'s research work is of inestimable value to Tamil and religious studies. While most of his conclusions appear acceptable to the present writer, it is felt that even where there is disagreement, his work is so well researched, the one who disagrees with his conclusions has to study and contemplate hard to be able to negative them. His is a productive work of far-reaching value and it deserves to be widely studied and discussed by Tamil intellectuals. One wishes further that similar studies are made, in such depth, of other works of importance in Tamil. For such studies to be carried on over long periods, generous endowments are very much needed. Research in the west has progressed so far mainly because of the availability of endowments and fellowships there. Universities, the state and the Central Governments and above all men of substance should encourage research by establishing generous fellowships. There is no other way the much-needed progress in fresh thinking can be made to happen in this part of the country.

Villipāratam

Villiputtūrar's *Pāratam* has attracted few critics to its study and assessment even though it is of a respectable standard as a creative work and the *Pāratam* story has been as popular in Tamil Nadu as the *Rāmāyaṇam*, from the earliest days. But there is a happy trend now seen among platform speakers who are giving a series of

talks on *Villipāratam* in religious forums. And at least two writers have performed a valuable service in composing detailed works on criticism of this classic.

One, entitled *Villipāratattil Kaṇṇan̲'* written for her doctor's degree by Mrs.Su. Vaḷḷiyammal is a work of commendable scholarship and unusual perception. He devotes considerable space, naturally, to Kaṇṇan̲ but she takes time to analyse the relationship each of the main characters bears to Him. Villi's poetic merits are carefully assessed but, in common with Tamil practice, no adverse remarks are made. She devotes a very well-written chapter on the way Villi describes Kannan with striking beauty, surpassing his idol Viyāca, the author of the original. One is surprised to find quotations drawn, not only from Tamil works but from English works written by Indians and others, in very apt fashion. The authoress seems to have the correct mental attitude and the industry to become a major critic from the promise held out in what seems to be her first book.

The other book entitled *Pārata nūlkaḷin̲ Tir̲an̲āyvu* written by *A.Vicuvanātan̲* makes a major contribution by giving a detailed critical account of the many *Pāratams* in Tamil. The author displays a certain maturity in discussing and assessing literary qualities. It would greatly benefit Tamil studies if these two researchers fine-hone their critical faculties and apply them to a critical study of *Villi Pāratam* in a comprehensive manner.

Almost nothing that is worthwhile has been done by way of critical studies on the two *kāppiyams* on the Nala story. Na Vi. Jeyarāman̲ has written a number of useful volumes on various *pirapantam* genres which display his critical acuman. Like most others, he too shies at adverse criticism. Still his work is quite useful especially on account of the paucity of critical literature in the field of minor *pirapantams*. Dr. John Samuel has published a number of penetrating studies on classical literature; his work on *Tēmpāvaṇi* is particularly noteworthy

It is a sad feature that has attracted the attention of thoughtful men and articles have appeared in the national press condemning the phenomenon that research guides whose knowledge in quite a few cases is strictly limited and who are too lazy to investigate new fields ram down the throats of research, scholars a highly limited range of subjects for doctoral research, while vast areas of Tamil literature remain unresearched. Here the heads of Tamil departments can ensure that researchers select subjects for their research that would benefit Tamil studies, and not merely accommodate the limitations of the guides. The present writer is pained to note the wholly uninspiring range of subjects on which doctoral research has been done in the recent past and is being done currently and he feels strongly that University Tamil departments should take effective steps to stem the rot quickly, if Tamil research is not to peter put to an exercise in futility.

Criticism of modern works

When we come to the modern period, the picture appears certainly brighter. A certain amount of good work has been done way of critical studies on the novel, the play and the short story, the typical products of the era. The major critics that should be cited here are Dr. Kā. Civattampi, Pe. Kō. Cuṉtararāṟacaṉ (Ciṭṭi), Cō. Civapatācuntaram, Ma. Rāmaliṅkam, Dr.Ta. Ve. Vīrācāmi, Dr. Ti. Murukarattiṉam and Mrs. Mīṉāṭci Murukarattiṉam, Dr.A.N. Perumāḷ, Ca. Centilnātaṉ, C.I. Maṟaimalai, Mī.Pa.Cōmacuntaram and Pa. Kotaṇṭarāman Dr. Muttucivaṉ and Ka.Kailācapati have made outstanding contributions not only on modern writing but on literary theory and their work will be dealt with a little later.

Many of these have adopted the western viewpoint and assessed Tamil fiction with western yardsticks. Handled carefully, these criteria can be useful in assessing Tamil fiction. Dr.Kā.Civattampi, Dr.Ma.Rāmaliṅkam and Dr.Ka. Kailācapati have performed this service with distinction. Dr.Civattampi's is a very objective study and his work *Nāvalum Vāḻkkaiyum* is a distinct contribution to critical

literature. Cuntararācaṉ and Civapātacuntaram have collaborated to produce a highly readable and useful compilation where the development of the Tamil novel has been traced over a period of a hundred years. These two critics have not merely noted down facts and given a list of works with their authors, they have studied them critically and analysed their contents in accord with the different approaches of the novelists. They have very recently launched another book of a similar nature, this on the development of the short story.

Vīrācāmi's *Tamiḻil Camūka Nāvalkaḷ* is a very laudable attempt at classifying social novels in Tamil under various categories like gandhian, social-reform-centred, rationalistic and ethical. Instead of adopting western criteria, Vīrācāmi has developed some local standards based on the traditions of the Tamil novel and used them to assess critically the major social novels.

Pa. Kōtaṇṭarāmaṉ has produced a veritable grammar of short story writing in his comprehensive and valuable work, *"Ciṟukatai - oru kalai"*. Dr.Perumāḷ has been deeply interested in drama (both in its traditional *kūttu* and its modern forms). His work presenting a critical study of drama is of value. But as dramatic literature itself is in its infancy in Tamil, we cannot expect high quality criticism on Tamil plays for a considerable time to come.

Kalki's art of short story writing and Putumaippittan's are discussed with critical acumen by Dr. Mrs. Mīṉāṭci and Dr. Ti. Murukarattiṉam respectively. Mī. Pa. Cōmacuntaram's three lectures on short stories have been issued in book form.

There is now a welcome trend in the shape of organisations like the Ilakkiyac Cintaṉai of Madras arranging for lectures periodically by creative writers and critics. This organisation awards prizes to the best short-story collections every year.

Work on literary theory

We may conclude this chapter with a survey of the work relating to the advancement of literary theory by Tamil writers. It is an

extremely sparsely populated field which seems to attract even fewer votaries than criticism. Tolkāppiyar was a most outstanding rhetorician and literary theorist whose very greatness seems to have shied away thinkers from the field. Thus it is that we find practically no advance in this field after Tolkāppiyar. Nāṟkavirāca Nampi, Iṟaiyaṉār and the authors of *Māṟaṉ akapporuḷ* and *Vīracōḻiyam* merely rehashed the principles found in *Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷatikāram;* they were not innovative thinkers who could advance the science by contributing original concepts of their own. The result has been that the dawn of the twentieth century saw Tamil aesthetics stagnating for two thousand years and more.

The discipline that is variously known as rhetorics, poetics, literary theory and aesthetics needs a subtle mind that is happy in dealing with, that is at home in abstractions; clarity of conception is a desideratum in this field. There are writers who have composed a number of books in this discipline calling them by ambitious names. Without any malice, an objective judge would declared that such writers do not possess these mental qualities to the needed degree to make a worthwhile contribution. Industry and scholarship alone are inadequate to comprehend, analyse and innovate asthetic concepts. The total absence of progress in the last two thousand years and the halting advance being made in this century are, partly at least, due to the fact that such a combination of rare mental qualities is demanded by this highly abstract discipline.

Celvakēcavarāya Mutaliyār made a valuable contribution to this discipline when he insisted on the poet's personality being comprehended as a pre-condition to the total enjoyment of his poetry. Va.Vē.Cu.Aiyar contributed several basic concepts like that of architectonics of a creative work, the feeling for form, the need for the parts of a creative work being related to one another and to the whole organically and the concept of *in medias res.* The major thinker in the field, however, was Dr. Ka. Kailācapati of Yāḻppāṇam (Jaffna) whose untimely death not long age put an end to a most promising career.

Kailācapati has an original slant on many literary situations and though one may not always agree with his conclusions, his logic and his profound knowledge of Tamil and western literature make his reasoning good to read and productive of active thinking on the part of the reader. It is not necessary that one should present only universally acceptable conclusions; if one's conclusions have been arrived at, not on whimsical grounds or reasons of prejudice but on the basis of sound reasoning, the discipline is substantially benefitted thereby. Kāilacapati had a strong leftist leaning and this showed up in his literary discussions. Even then, his literary assessments were not seriously warped and if one allowed for his pronounced Marxist sympathies, one can go along with him quite a long way indeed.

He has viewed the whole story of *Cilappatikāram* as a saga of the rise of the merchant community in Tamil society. He reads, with less conviction, a struggle between landholders and the trading class in the conflict between the Saivas and the jains during the time of Ñā<u>n</u>acampantar. This kind of interpretation where the fortunes of individuals are interpreted as the rise and fall of social classes is typically Marxist but Kailācapati's way of portraying them compels our attention and provokes us to think afresh.

Kailācapati sees socialist ideas in the *a<u>r</u>attuppāl* of the *Tirukku<u>r</u>aḷ* where he considers the significance of the word *pāttūṇ* (share what you have and enjoy only what you need). Even though these thoughts appeared at a time when private property had become the central motif in man's life, he thinks they are echoes of the thoughts which prevailed in the much earlier organisation of society which was socialist. In a similar way he is able to quote from much of Tamil literature (from the *Caṅkam* works, the three *kāppiyams* and now and then from later works too) in support of this socialist doctrine. Even where this "share-and-share-alike" doctrine is clearly not in practice, he points out that poets preach it as a most desirable principle for the society to follow. These ideas are clearly set forth

in his own lucid style in his *"Camūkaviyalum Ilakkiyamum"*.

Kailācapati represents the other pole from the kind of highly subjective viewing of poetry which TKC glorified. He regards the critic as a person highly trained for his job who brings specific tools to the assessment of literature. While literary criticism can never be wholly objective, it should, according to Kailācapati, be based on some specific criteria which the readers understand and respect.

He describes four such criteria in some detail in his flagship work, *Ilakkiyamum Tiranāyvum*. They can be briefly described as the imitative, the pragmatic, the expressionist and the objective doctrines forming, not distinct and exclusive criteria but rather representing four approaches, two or more of which can be and are, in fact, being adopted by good literary critics. The imitative approach believes that art should imitate nature. This does not mean a photocopy; it means only that the artist selects what appeals to him in nature and uses it to create a product with an artistic form. The pragmatic doctrine insists in some use being made of literature (like elevating man's nature through didactic writing); this would naturally lead to assessing literature on the basis of the use to which it can be put. The expressionists would study the creative artist closely and try to trace the trends found in his product to character and personality traits in the creator. The objective school would insist on concentrating on the subject matter of the work, the work itself, to the exclusion of all other aspects. This is closely related to the thinking of the genre critics whose heyday was the era immediately after the First world War. We shall be devoting the last chapter to a brief consideration of the tenets of this school.

It will be found that Kailācapati was neither haughtily opinionated nor intolerant in his discussion of the different approaches. These attitudes do not go well with an honest enquiry into an extremely subtle matter which the best brains have been trying to puzzle out without much success for three millennia or more.

Chapter Nine

GENRE CRITICISM AND TAMIL LITERATURE

General background

To the conservative Tamil for whom the criteria and purpose and methodology of literary criticism have been laid down by Tolkappiyar as an unalterable pattern till the end of time the emergence of a large number of new schools of criticism in the last hundred and fifty years may come as a surprise. (The position that obtains in the other language areas in India is no different, as far as the present writer can see. The Sanskritist firmly believes that the rasa theory as laid down by Sage Bharata and as modified by Anandavardhana holds unchallenged sway and shall hold sway till the end of time. In all the regions of India speaking languages derived from Sanskrit too, this belief holds the field; and in the Dravidian area, too, outside the Tamil land, the basis of Sanskrit poetics is accepted without question. So this is an all-India situation and not one confined to the Tamil land).

It is not that the west does not have a father figure in poetics as we have in Tolkāppiyar and Sage Bharata. The history of western poetics starts with Aristotle who discovered perhaps some of the concepts and codified the rest from the current Greek thinking. His prestige in the west was as great as that of Tolkāppiyar and Sage Bharata; the difference consists only in the realization by western thinkers that by discovering and developing new concepts they do not dishonour the old prophet; in actuality, they realise that it was Aristotle's lucid concepts that provided the urge in them to strike out boldly into new pastures and widen their horizon. And hence every new

thinker who furnishes a new slant to poetic theory offers a fresh flower at the altar of Aristotle. Unless fresh discovery is realised in our country to constitute the truest kind of homage to the old prophets, art and science will not progress. The last word on any subject can never be said by anyone, however talented.

There have been, as we pointed out, many schools of criticism in the last century and a half; not all of them are of equal importance and they are not all mutually exclusive. As was stated in the passage on Kailācapati in the last chapter, more than one criteria may be combined and harnessed to the assessment of a creative work. Each of these schools stresses one particular aspect which appeared the most important in the eyes of its originator. Thus the impressionist school swears by the impact of nature (inanimate and animate including man) on the psyche of the poet which he passes on to the reader. The expressionist school, while admitting that nature and the environs do play a part and a not unimportant part, aver that it is the peculiar and distinct reaction of a poet's personality that dominates his creative work. Hence critics of this school take great pains to study the poet as they believe that such a study of his personality is the most essential pre-condition to the comprehension of his product.

The school of Roman Classicism of which the brightest star was Longinus was after sublimity in poetry. Indeed Longinus reads more like a metaphysician in many passages than a rhetorician. But his school provides for the old idea that poetry should lead to the transport of the audience; his thinking admits into its fold a consideration of the oustanding personality of the poet and even of the devices of rhetoric which Coleridge would style as the externals of poetry; he believed in the democratic idea that great poetry is that which pleases all, at all times. This concept taken from a very early stage of the development of western poetics is cited to show how comprehensive, how inclusive these critical schools really are.

The modern phase of development in poetics must be considered to have begun in a big way with the publication of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria.* Coleridge had the capacity for sustained abstract thinking; he was part philosopher, part aesthete. His bold and lucid conceptualization of imagination as 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation' and his distinguishing it from mere fancy are major contributions. He has said something new and useful about most other topics of poetics too. Even if his ideas do not rule the field today (which can scarcely be expected to happen with the tumultuous fecundity of fresh thinking going on in the west today) the thinkers who came after him have all been indebted to him for the stimulation of the mind he has generated.

The Principles of genre criticism

One school of thinkers whose basic concepts have been stimulated by Coleridge's ideas is called the Genre Critics. This school began to air its views in the years immediately after the second World War (its first shot was fired in 1950 actually) and its influence is still felt even in the writings of those who differ with it. As this work is a study of Tamil literary genres and the principles of the (American) school of genre criticism have not been widely made known to the Tamil-loving public, it was considered appropriate that the concepts of this school are set forth briefly here and an attempt made to show how they can be applied to Tamil literature with salutary results.

The essential principle that sustains this school of literary criticism is that a creative work should be judged by its wholeness. The task of a genre critic is to examine a work to see if the parts are organically related to each other and, more importantly, to the whole. A work of art should not be judged by examining how it is related to some normative universal; the assessment should be based on its internal character as a particular object. Genre critics do certainly, examine the plot of a poem its characterization, the concepts, the

incidents, the metre and the diction; but none of these is valuable in the eyes of the genre critic as an entity in itself; its value, the value of each of these components consists solely in how it affects, influences or modifies the central motif or ' the choice' of the work as Elder Olson would term it.

A work whose diction is excellent would not necessarily receive praise on that account from a genre critic; he would examine whether this kind of diction goes well with the whole work, whether this augments its spirit and reinforces its significance, whether this diction is organically related to 'the choice' of the work as a limb is related to the living body. If it is, then and then only it gets the imprimatur of his approval.

Devoted readers of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* would readily recall how much he was attached to the concept of organic form. He was very insistent on a relationship between the parts of a work and the whole, that is wholly functional. His great admiration for the plays of Shakespeare was mainly based on the excellent organic relationship that subsists between the parts and the whole. A criterion of critical assessment which Coleridge lovingly fashioned was that a creative work should generate "as much immediate pleasure in parts as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole"1. It could be seen from these statements that Coleridge hada a clear concept of how Criticism should be based on the wholeness of a work and that therefore he was really the father of the school of Genre criticism. That Coleridge was indebted for this as well as many other ideas to Aristotle is an indisputable fact; but to Coleridge should belong the credit of having formally spelt out the basic doctrine of this school of criticism.

Thus the analysis of creative work by a genre critic brings out the harmony and the beauty born of that harmony of its internal structure, revealing the organic unity of a whole in which every part

is functional and necessary where it is placed. To quote from Elder Olson, "Epic, tragedy and comedy.......... are ordered not to a doctrine but to a plot. A plot is not a string of incidents but a system of incidents so constructed as to give us specific pleasure by arousing and allaying our emotions".2 Olson's phrasing that a plot is a system of incidents and not a string of them is particularly happy as it stresses the essential basic doctrine of this school. The idea is that the incidents appearing in a work of fiction should not be loosely put together; they should be naturally interrelated and should happen as inevitable consequences of the nature of the characters when acted on by the forces described.

A good example of this will be the *Rāmāyaṇam*. If the *Pālakāṇṭam* is excluded, then the incidents in the rest of the work fulfil the condition laid down by Olson as they are natural to the time and the place of their happening and inevitable when we consider the impact of certain events on the characters. Rāvaṇan is bound to fall in love with Citai on hearing Cūrppaṇakai's description of her, as he is oversexed and unrestrained in giving a free play to his passions. When Citai is abducted, Rāma as a member of the warrior race cannot but devise ways and means of crossing over the enemy territory and make war on the villain. It is this inevitability about the incidents and their natural, organic relationship with each other and to the whole work that distinguishes the *Rāmāyaṇam* from the Odyssey where you have only a string, not a system of incidents.

All this is certainly reasonable and pertinent; but the reader may wonder why this school is called that of Genre Criticism. A basic concept of this school is that when assessing critically works of different genres, one should judge them on the basis of the absolute differences in their internal composition.Here they differ sharply with the AmericanNew Critics who start by applying to them some *a priori notions*. A *kāppiyam* should be judged on the criteria that have been

evolved for a *kāppiyam* as a distinct genre. The metre and the diction, for instance, that would suit a *piḷḷaittamiḻ* work may not suit an *ulā* work; there is no question of some metres being lovely on an absolute scale nor is there a standard diction that will fit naturally into all genres. The selection of every one of these components will be examined not from the viewpoint of its absolute goodness or worth but rather from that of its appropriateness to the particular literary genre where it is used. Each genre has its own special structure and its unique potential and a genre critic is mainly engaged, when assessing a creative work, in finding out whether it fulfils the potential of its genre.

The genre is indeed the basis of consideration here. If the same poet has written two works in two different genres, there is little point, according to the genre critic, in comparing them. On the other hand, if two poets have composed works in the same genre and they have some comparable points, it is certainly permissible to use them for their assessment on a comparative basis. Thus, in this school two works of the same genre by different poets are comparable but not two works of different genres by the same poet; it thus sharply differs from the expressionist school where the author's personality takes the pride of place and two works of even different genres from the pen of the same poet will be considered as natural candidates for comparison.

The foremost critics of the school

The chief workers in the field are Elder Olson from whom we have quoted earlier, R.S. Crane, W.R. Keast, Richard McKeon, Norman Maclean and Bernard Weinberg. A definitive work on the subject of genre criticism is R.S. Crane's *Critics and Criticism*, a collection of twenty essays published in 1952. Works applying the principles of this school to specific literary pieces should be studied to get an idea of the scope of application and the way one can weigh their quality

through such application; examples of such practical application can be found in Elder Olson's *A Symbolic Reading of Ancient Mariner.The Poetry of Dylan Thomas* and *the Poetry of Wallace Stevens.*

While these writers generally agree on the basics of their school, they do not always say the same thing, they do not adopt the same procedure everywhere. This is very much to be expected in the cases of men with original minds. They certainly share the same beliefs as to how critics should view a creative work but, fortunately there is no regimentation, no dictator laying down a dead uniformity. Hence, when we apply these basis criteria to Tamil literature, while taking care not to trample them underfoot, we shall have the utmost freedom in devising the most suitable procedures for the field chosen.

Caṅkam short lyrics assessed

In many ways, *Caṅkam* love lyrics form an admirable field where the principles of genre criticism can be applied. In fact, this is the genre in which the wisdom of the rhetoricians (led by Tolkāppiyar and the genius of the poets themselves combine to present a product of unfractured wholeness. The *Caṅkam* poets exercised a firm control over their diction and a strict economy of words was a characteristic of their poetry. Hence every word used in their love poetry had a purpose to serve; the metre they employed predominantly is so flexible and simple, they did not have to use 'packing material' to fill it; another feature of the metre to which reference has been drawn earlier is that the poem could stop where the poet runs out of matter whereas in the *viruttams*, the four-line structure may, in some cases, need extra words as packing material or fillers for the stanza to be metrically complete. Coleridge would regard the word as the basic"component"; genre criticism expects that every component should work towards building up the wholeness of the poem; this requirement is fulfilled in *Caṅkam* love poetry more naturally and fully than in any other class of literature.

But there is more to it than mere words and the poet's control over them. The literary conventions lay down firmly the exact background against which each of the recognised five phases of love could be delineated, even the part of the day in which they could happen was fixed. And the *Caṅkam* poets followed these conventions meticulously. Hence in every poem, every aspect or component was conjured up as a specific stimulative agency to evoke the particular phase of love. No component was left to be casually picked by the poet at his whim-which may militate against the total effect. Thus the literary conventions of the epoch and the genius of the poet combined to produce a totality of effect where each component was organically related to all the others and, more importantly, to the whole.

It would appear a mystery to the reader unacquainted with *Caṅkam* love literature how with the poets in so docile a fashion following the conventions, they could achieve anything like originality. The question has been posed and answered in the present writer's work *Convention and Creativity in Caṅkam Love Lyrics.* The answer in brief is that the conventions themselves, far from being tyrannical and restrictive are such that they help the poet to be innovative and imaginative; at the same time, they enable him to achieve this effect in the fewest possible words, simultaneously helping to evoke in the cultivated reader a mental state where he is eager and ready to receive the experience transferred by the poet. It is also equally true that the poets of the *Caṅkam* Age were independent enough to innovate new situations, going the required distance beyond the limitations of the conventions if warranted.

Now let us briefly examine some poems from the viewpoint of genre criticism. The first example can be the one quoted in Chapter Two, beginning with the line,

He isn't here and the mullai blooms

which is verse 221 of the *Kuṟuntokai.* This verse is cast in the

mullaittiṇai where the prevailing sentiment has to be the anguish caused by separation of the lovers with the rider that it is not a long separation and there is no cause for despair as in the case of *Pālaittiṇai*.

Now the girl's pointed grievance is that her young man promised to her at the time of parting that he would return with the first rains; now the first rains had come urging the *mullai* to put forth tiny buds and still he had not turned up. Everything needed to remind the reader that it is happening in the meadows is there in the poem. Sheep are mentioned, milk is referred to and *mullai* buds are emphasised. The time is also clearly stated to be gloaming. Every component of the poem which is related to every other makes a specific contribution towards creating a feeling of wholeness, the evocation of the sentiment of love-in-separation. No component, it may be noted, is brought in, in a contrived manner. The girl has to say that she has personally seen *mullai* buds. She actually saw them on the hair of the shepherd boy who had come to barter milk for grain, at the end of the day-long spell of grazing the sheep. All the components are natural parts of the whole, they are there because they belong there. The poet is able to introduce the time (evening) adroitly, but without any contriving, at the point where he mentions the shepherds driving the sheep home from the grazing grounds.

Caṅkam lyrics of greater length

Let us take a longer poem, verse 33 from *Akanāṉūṟu* which can be translated as below:

The boy speaks:

My wayward mind, inconstant, prone to fly
From whim to whim, capricious tormentor!
You drive me mad, you sure shall lay me open
To public banter in my ruthless native village!
Not long ago you made me leave my girl
To go forth seeking wealth in distant climes:

You spoke enticing words in praise of wealth-

All the endless good that wealth can buy for me.
So I left her, the fairest maiden wrapped up all in me,
All alone in the teeming world, a hapless prey to grief.
Now I walk the pathless wastes of burning desert sands
And barren hills where prickly pebbles torment him that walks
At every tread-where from its perch on the leafless bough of a tree
The eagle lets out plaintive notes of unrequited love
Shrill, urgent notes to his distant mate through the arid desert air.
Recalcitrant mind of mine! you heard the strident call
Of the killer bird, the predator, the scourge of the desert skies.
If the gentle nudging of the tender passion moves his stony heart
It sure can move you-and it did; but the change was badly timed!
Having lured me on to travel with vaulting hopes of gold
Far from the girl on whom is centred all my inner being,
You hark back now, inconstant you, to loving thoughts of her
To those eyes that mock at flowers, drowsy-drunk with love,
Forsaking me to loneliness amidst these barren tracts.
You should have valued love, my mind, and not this tinsel wealth
Before this venture. Now to stop and trace my painful way
Back to the village with empty hands, the purpose unfulfilled
Will expose me to mockery;far better it would be
For me to court a painful death in the trackless desert wastes

Than to face the scornful words and the painful mocking laughter
And derisive looks and the sobriquet of the feck-less never-do-well
From the spiteful village carpers.

(Akam 33) *(3)*

Though it is accounted long (from the *Caṅkam* point of view) it would be clear to the genre critic that every component in it, every word, in fact, leads the reader inexorably to the one sentiment, the bitter anguish of a long separation, the prevailing emotion of the *Pālaittiṇai*. In this poem, the young man is urged by his need for wealth with which to run the household to leave the girl behind to traverse desert wastes. Midway he hears the plaintive notes of unrequited love let out by an eagle of the desert, shrill,urgent notes to his distant mate through the arid desert air. This drives out all thoughts of wealth from him and makes him chastise his own wayward, inconstant mind for sending him trudging the weary desert tracks in pursuit of money and midway, suddenly developing an uncontrollable longing to go home to be with he girl of his heart. Every scene, every physical object described in the poem is evocative of the ruthless desert which reinforces the anguish in his heart. The master stroke, of course, is the desert eagle's mating cell, making him feel utterly wretched. The careful reader will not find a single thought or feeling, a single word that is out of place in this; everything works up assiduously and pointedly to the central purpose which is the evocation of the sentiment of love-in-separation with undertones of despair. Every part, every component fits into the picture, going to make the whole emotional state effective without any distracting element.

While the conventions and the system of symbols have been perfectly organised in the case of *Caṅkam* love poetry and not so well

in the *puṟam* lyrics, many of the *puṟam* poems too display the sense of integrated wholeness. As an example poem 86 of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* can serve; it has been presented in translation in chapter two. This is cast in the version of a hero's mother who tells a young caller, probably a girl in love with him that she does not know where he is to be found and instructs her to seek him where a battle rages most fiercely, in the vicinity. The poem attains a glow from the telling analogy where the hero is the tiger and the mother's womb is the casual mountain cave where it has slept during the day; it underscores the degree of detachment that a Tamil mother of a hero ideally develops towards her son. Every part of the poem, even every word has a contribution to make to the whole to which it is organically and naturally related.

Let us study another piece (No.226) from the same wonderful anthology of *puṟam* poems, the *Puṟanāṉūṟu*. A Cōḻa king lies dead and the poet who had obtained largesses from him in the happy days past laments now in a short six-line dirge where his heroism in the field of battle comes in for praise on an equal footing with his ingrained love of literary patronage. Death, he concludes, could not have worsted him in a feat of arms, he could have got his life only by supplication as a famished bard:

Death has claimed him! How did it get him?
Not by nursing a burning vengeance,
Not by battle, by a feat of arms.
He could never have suffered defeat,
He never knew in all his life
What it was to surrender,
To bow in meekness before a mightier foe!
Death should have come as a suppliant,
Should have come to him as a famished bard
And asked as largess the king 's own life.
Death could have got him in no other wise!

(*Puṟam* 226) (4)

It is easy enough to present a totally integrated poem if you keep it very short, as the two examples discussed undoubtedly are. What of bigger poems? Let us select one of the longest poems in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* for investigation. The poem (No.35) is one with a difference; for here we do not have hypoerbolic praise of a munificent giver by a poor bard. This belongs to the genre called *cevi aṟivuṟū* ' offering counsel), this is a spirited passage where unpleasant counsel is proffered firmly to an erring king by a courageous poet who intercedes to save harassed people from tyrannical exploitation. The king is ambitious to win glory in the battlefield and as wars are expensive, he starts collecting taxes ruthlessly without regard to the capacity of the taxed to pay. The harassed people beg an intrepid poet to intercede on their behalf and the poem presents his spirited and wholesome counsel to the callous king. In those days when kings enjoyed absolute powers of life and death over their subjects, it must take a great deal of selfless courage for an impoverished poet (whose only source of livelihood is largess from kings) to remonstrate in these terms with the king of the realm. Here is the piece:

Out of the kingdoms famed in song,
Three in number, whose martial prowess
Is proclaimed with the beat of drums,
The greatest is your Cōḻa land,
Matchless with the abundant crops
Of stately sugarcane fed by the floods
Of the Kāviri river that never fails
Even if the sun doth change his course
And the planets swerve from their patterned orbits!
O proud king, that rule over this
The land of bounty, hearken to me!
Your forebears on the Cōḻa throne
Were, like the deity of the moral order,
Passionately fond of justice
And a benign rule: well could they bring

Welcome showers for the thirsty land,
For what they willed did come to pass.
Know, O King! the towering white
Umbrella your minions hold,
The insignia of a mighty king
Is not meant to shield your person
From the inclemency of sun and rain
But symbolises your unique station
As the protector of the harassed people!
You love glory in the field of battle,
You love the thrill, the risk and the triumph;
But wars are fought and wars are won
With the fruit of the farmer's ceaseless toil
From whence spring the sinews of war.
Where the peasants languish, the land decays,
And for the ruler and for the ruled
There cannot be the triumphs of war
There cannot be the boons of peace.
In the tradition of our hoary land
The people are prone to blame the king
When the monsoon fails and the spectre of drought,
The spectre of famine darkens the land
And things befall that are opposed to nature.
Realise your kingly duties,
Contemplate the role your peasants
Play in your country's economy
And look after their interests
With love and care and solicitude;
Discard, O King, the counsel proffered
By your mealy- mouthed courtiers
And tend the men that till the field
For, where peasants are happy blooms the land!

(Puṟam 35) (5)

The intelligent reader will see on examinations that the poet who lauds the Cōḻa line of Kings excessively has no word of praise for this particular king. The message is as clear as daylight; this king's predecessors have a great tradition of caring for the people to uphold but he himself is oppressing the people on the advice of unprincipled flatterers in his court. If the country should prosper and the king's reputation is not to be sullied, he should discard the counsel of these courtiers and regulate his conduct as his forebears did. The whole long poem of 36 lines is totally integrated and organised to deliver this message with the maximum effectiveness. Everywhere the personal good of the king is played down and his role as the protector of the people is emphasised. The reference to the white umbrella is particularly telling; the king should not casually assume that it is there to shield him from the sun; his royal person will never be exposed to the rays of the sun. The umbrella is a symbol of the care and solicitude a king must display towards a harassed people. The poet refers boldly also to the most sensitive fact (often suppressed by opportunist courtiers) that it is the tax collected from the people that sustains the king. Very few kings would care to be reminded of this unpleasant but wholly true relationship between the people and the king as that which should subsist between a paymaster and a recipient. All this comes out with a bell-like clarity from this brilliantly executed poem. We are assured by an old footnote to it that the king did listen to the wise counsel and remit the extortive tax.

The long poems of the Caṅkam age

Let us now turn our attention to the longest poems of the *Caṅkam* age, the members of the *Ten Long Poems*. Here we have five pieces in the *āṟṟuppaṭai* genre where a person-it may be a poet, it may be a musician or an actor-who has obtained gifts from a munificent patron, directs another to him. This naturally involves praise of the donor; poets of this genre have lined up their pieces with detailed. descriptions of the route the person has to take to reach the patron

and the sights and sounds and people he would come across enroute. Here we do not find that wonderful economy of words we see in the smaller poems where the genre critic is gratified to find that every word makes a contribution to the whole. But still the critic may decide on an overall view that the components are more or less integrated and serve the purpose of enriching the motif of the genre. The description of the splendour of the donor-king's capital and of his heroism in the field of battle may be construed as serving the purpose of reassuring the penurious artiste of the ability of the donor to give munificently.

Mullaippāṭṭu, the smallest of the ten poems is the most integrated of all. Its central motif is love-in-separation and every incident , every description more or less accentuates this sentiment. The incident of "listening to an omen" which we get very early on is particularly beautiful and wholly relevant to the context. The description of the war camp is a little overdone and it cannot be seriously maintained that every sub-component in it adds meaning and purpose to the whole.

Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu from the celebrated Kapilar who may be ranked as the greatest of the *Caṅkam* poets comes as a bit of a disappointment. The individual scenes and descriptions are certainly good and the language full of flavour. But the intelligent reader finds there is a distinct attempt to pack the piece with as many of the characteristic sub-themes of *kuṟiñcit tiṇai* as possible, without a thought about whether they are all strictly relevant, whether they add meaning and significances to the motif of the poem. The ancient exegetical footnote to this poem tells us that this was composed By Kapilar to teach the Aryan king Prahattaṉ, Tamil literature. This seems to solve the problem referred to above. For, in that case, the poet was writing a lesson in a text book, not a creative poem; and he naturally put in all the possible themes of *kuṟiñci*, not that they were all needed to fulfil the genre's purpose but that they could be easily absorbed

The Paṭṭiṉappālai

Paṭṭiṉappālai constitutes a model poem for the student of genre criticism to work upon. This has beautiful pictures of the city of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam and a vigorous portraiture of the Cōḻa king's prowess in war. The poem has received high praise as a creative literary work; the present writer has enjoyed its beauties and has lectured on them in literary forums. But to the genre critic, the poem does not look so good. Its defects are so pronounced, it can be taken up for discussion in the classroom to explain the scope and value of genre criticism. For though its parts are good, they are not integrated, their relevance is doubtful, they do not add meaning to the whole sense of its genre.

This is composed as a love poem in the *Pālaittiṇai;* the young man, unnamed as in all *Caṅkam* love lyrics, is tempted by his avaricious mind to go forth, leaving his young wife behind, to earn wealth; he remonstrates with his mind saying that even if he were to obtain the city of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam with all its wealth as the fruit of his endeavours in distant parts, he would not leave his wife and hearth behind, he would not be parted from her, he would be by her side all the time.

Now, in smaller poems of this type, there would be a reference to an earlier journey which he had undertaken to earn wealth, which took him through pitiless barren deserts where he had suffered untold anguish, less from the conditions without and more on account of the separation from his girl. Here, in such poems, most of the space is taken up by a vividly realistic description of the desert with a reference to a bird or a beast of prey displaying tender affection for its mate. The components of such poems are very naturally and organically related to each other and to the central motif and they score the highest credits in the criticism scale.

But in the *Paṭṭiṉap pālai*, the distribution of space is on a different plan altogether. In a poem of 301 lines, the first 218 are devoted to a glowing description of the lush, fertile Kāviri delta and the rich, teeming city in it; the relevance of this mighty long passage is that the young man says at the end of it that even if his journey were to get him riches equal to the price of this city he would not undertake it!

Then in the 2 1/2 lines following, he declares his intention of not undertaking the journey; he then embarks on a description of Tirumāvaḷavaṉ, the Cōḻa king's invincible might which occupies nearly a hundred lines; the relevance of this long passage is that the youth compares the hot desert to the javelin of the king and declares he would never journey over it leaving the shoulders of his girl that are cooler than the sceptre of the king. This last passage occupies another 2 1/2 lines. To sum up, the central motif of this poem in *pālait tiṇai* occupies 5 lines; the descriptions whose relevance is either sketchy or wholly absent occupy 296 lines!

These figures speak out the shocking sense of proportion of the poet. But that is not all. For the sentiment of love-in-separation gets evoked and enriched through a vivid description of the desert tracts where birds and animals display great love for their mates. Here, the poem is dominated overweeningly (to an extent of over 66 2/3 percent of the lines) by a description of the incredibly fertile Kāviri delta and the rich, bustling commercial city which is its capital. *Caṅkam* poets believed in painting a proper background for every sentiment. Here the background of a riverine plain should evoke the sentiment of anguish, born, not out of an unwilling parting from a loving partner but as a result of the infidelity of the man ensnared by public women. This is blasphemy in the eyes of convention and poor poetry from any viewpoint. The poet wanted to sing a panegyric

on his patron; so he composed 218 lines on his capital city and 100 lines on his martial prowess. Some of these passages read very well indeed; there are vignettes of the market place and the other parts of the city vividly portrayed. But separate bricks, however good, need not necessarily mean a fine edifice. Most unfortunately he chose a wrong genre through which to channelise his bardic poetry. He did not see the whole poem as an artist should see it. The parts do not fit into the whole, the proportions are disastrous, the central motif is hidden under a whole lot of debris.

The Neṭunalvāṭai

The *Neṭunalvāṭai* is a poem of *puṟam* genre even though the love-lorn condition of the queen is the main motif. This is because the identity of the king has been disclosed-which pushes it out of the pale of *akam* poetry. Another important reason is that the poem is not entirely presented as the version of a character; in fact, most of it has been presented in the poet's version as in the case of *puṟam* poetry. It would be clear to the intelligent reader that the basic conventions of *Caṅkam* love poetry were slowly being watered down with time and that when we come to the time of the *Ten Long Poems*, the process of watering down had proceeded quite far, indeed. As this process takes a certain time, perhaps a hundred years, it is doubtful if the same Nakkīrar and Kapilar who composed those wonderfully poetic pieces included in *Kuṟuntokai* and *Naṟṟiṇai* did really author the *Neṭunalvāṭai* and the *Kūṟiñcippāṭṭu* in view of the long inter-rugnum involved.

From various indications in the poem, the essential sentiment involved must be anguish born of long separation or the *Pālait tiṇai*. Even though the poem has been consigned to *puṟam*, the essential characteristics of *pālai* should have been portrayed in view of the central motif being deep anguish engendered by separation of the husband, the king from his queen. There is not a single word

referring to the desert or the heat of the sun beating down on men and animals alike. On the other hand, the cold season when there is a persistent drizzle has been diligently described. The season and the territory as laid down for *pālai* have simply not been presented and, on the other hand, a different season and territory have been vividly delineated. Hence, from this limited viewpoint, the parts do not add meaning to the whole.

But the sufferings of the lonely wife getting enhanced during winter is true to nature and the effects of the cold, rainy weather have been so beautifully described that this poem ranks quite high in the assessment of the genre critic. *Caṅkam* conventions have certainly been trodden underfoot but the components do add substantially to the impact of the whole poem and hence the genre critic may give a favourable judgment on the poem. There is one technical difficulty, however. This poem talks of the *pālai* aspect in one place and the *vakai* in another. We are unable to bring it under any clear classification in the *Tolkāppiyam* table. This does not take away from the merit of the poem to any noticeable extent. If we steer clear of technicalities here is an integrated poem where the central motif of anguish due to separation has been enriched and reinforced by every component.

The Maturaikkāñci

We can now examine the longest work of the *Caṅkam* age-the *Maturaikkāñci*. The poem is cast as a piece of philosophical counsel from a celebrated poet to one of the greatest kings of the age. The genre is *kāñci* which involves an emphasis on the transience of worldly possessions, of life itself on this earth, leading the person counselled to the development of detachment in preparation for his final emancipation from the cycle of births and deaths. This is a very contemplative and even pessimistic genre which doesnot go well with the joyously vibrant, optimistic *Caṅkam* Tamils who took delight in sensory enjoyment without abjuring it as a source of sin. The genre

would admirably suit the religious cults which came from the north-purāṇic Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. When these cults came and strongly influenced the Tamil land, poets began to write pessimistic verse, redolent with talk of sin and salvation and horrible tortures in hell. But this was very much opposed to the emotional personality of the Tamils of the *Caṅkam* Age who firmly believed in enjoying the good things of life without transgressing the moral law.

In view of this pronounced natural propensity, it is rather unfortunate that a Tamil poet of the *Caṅkam* age thought of designing a poem in this genre at all. Once he decided on this genre, he should have fought against the native tendency to an optimistic hedonism and produced a fully philosophical poem, pointing up wherever possible, the evanescence of worldly life and wealth and youth and teaching the ways by which the needed detachment could be developed.

Instead, he was able to devote only 28 lines out of a total of 782 lines to the topic of transience. In reality only 3 1/2 lines out of these 28 speak about the transience of pelf and of man's life in this planet, the rest of this passage delineating the pelf itself and the life of fulfilment even of luxury that kings lead before they perish. The vast bulk of the poem. i.e.99% of it lauds the king's prowess and pelf, in the well-trodden way of all panegyrical works..f a poem on the depressing evanescence of all created things, that has as its objective the inculcation of the spirit of detachment from all worldly things and the imparting of the method by which one can reach the highest beatitude can spare only 3 1/2 lines put of a total of 782, i.e.less than 1/2 of one percent to the discussion of these central themes, it can only be termed a poetic disaster from the viewpoint of the genre critic.

A closer examination of the bigger (or 99%) part of the poem will reveal to the careful reader how, repeatedly, the poet talks of the continuous, unremitting prosperity and power wielded by the Pāṇṭiya line of kings from its semi-mythical forebears of pre-history. This is

a far cry indeed from the talk of evanescence. Nowhere else in this 99% part of the poem can one find a trace of that philosophical pessimism which is the characteristic mood of this genre. This only confirms the earlier judgement of the genre critic that this is a sensational failure as a *kāñci* poem.

It is not that the poem does not have good passages; in fact, it is full of them. Here is a tragedy of the deepest dimensions; most of the components of the poem are high quality verse but they do not add up to a good poem. More than the *Paṭṭiṉap pālai*, the *Maturaik Kāñci* has fine portraits of urban living; if the former describes Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam, the latter describes the greater city Maturai in a larger canvas. These two poems can be ideally used by publishing extracts of them in anthologies whose worth will be boosted by them. In other words, the components of these poems can be enjoyed as separate vignettes, they do not integrate into whole good poems.

Both the poets could well have written good poems cast in the genre of *pāṭāṇ (tiṇai)*, omitting the extremely short passages they have had to introduce just to satisfy the letter (and not the spirit) of the wrong genres they had chosen. The poems smell richly of panegyrics, and they are nothing but panegyrics. It is not clear what prompted these bards (who incidentally bear the names of good poets whose beautiful creations are to be found in the Eight Anthologies) to go in for these genres whose potential they did nothing to fulfil; perhaps it was the fashion of the day, perhaps these later poets had lost that sureness of touch which characterised the masters of earlier years. Whatever the reason, these poets faulted badly in their judgment and the genre critic has, perforce, to dismiss their products as dismal failures.

The Tirukkuṟaḷ

The most important of the Eighteen Later Works is the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. As a compendium of extremely wise maxims forming a guidebook for

harassed mankind, it is without an equal in Tamil and must surely rank as one of the best of its kind in the world. But here we are engaged in genre criticism and it is necessary to take a fresh look at the work from the peculiar (but not unreasonable) standpoint of that school.

The work is divided into 3 books-one for moral maxims, one for economics and politics and administration and one for love, Whatever one may say about the wisdom of the three-fold concept of *aṟam, poruḷ* and *iṉpam* as *purucartas*, it is clearly not a literary concept; it is at best a philosophical concept and not a very acceptable one at that.*Aṟam* is a way of life and it cannot be dealt with as an independent purpose of life; nor can *poruḷ* and *iṉpam* be admitted as permissible purposes of a good life, divorced from *aṟam*. This confused concept is clearly not native to the Tamil land; Tamil thinking about *aṟam, poruḷ* and *iṉpam* would not permit them to be clubbed together as equal members of a trinity. The noblest minds in the Sanskrit world also did not set much store by this as is evident from a statement of Kāḷitāca; in describing a king of the Solar Race, he says that his enjoyment of *artha* (*poruḷ*) and *kāma* *(iṉpam)* was ever in line with the dictates of dharma *(aṟam)*.

Hence it would appear that where Tiruvaḷḷuvar should have written three separate works, he committed a mistake in clubbing these disparate things in one volume. Those who read the work will certainly get the feeling that the wave length varies greatly from part to part; the variation will be felt to be dramatic when they come to the *kāmattuppāl*. This is on account of the genre differences involved; *aṟam* and *poruḷ* and *iṉpam* clearly belong, in the literary world, to different genres and the poets of the early *Caṅkam* age would never have made the mistake of combining them all together in one work.

Let us study now the method of presentation in these three books. Vaḷḷuvar was a great law-giver and moralist, perhaps the greatest

the world has ever produced. He lays down moral precepts in the first part, as do's and dont's commandments. In the next part, too, he offers extremely sage counsel to kings and to ordinary men about certainly worldly institutions. But in the third part, this legislating and counselling method is given up; and the author describes the various phases of love, very much in the model set by the *Akam* works of the early *Caṅkam* age. There is little or none of precepts or sage counsel in it. Hence there is no consistency in the methodology and the style of presentation.

The superficial reader may feel that there does exist a continuity and a consistency in all the three parts of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. This impression is created by the unique metre chosen for all the parts and also by Tiruvaḷḷuvar's characteristically condensed style of expression. A deeper study will convince the reader that in regard to the subject-matter and the method of presentation there is a certain eddying when he enters the third part, there is a change in tone and wavelength and flavour which definitely disturbs the homogeneity of the work.

It is clearly the third part, the *kāmattuppāl* that bedevils this excellent work. Without it, the first two parts could have been clubbed together under the common title," a guide book for an all-round good life". All the necessary guidelines for a morally and materially sound life are there in these two parts. Instructions regulating even the sex life are included in the first book in atikarams 6 and 15 and good counsel on morals in regard to sex is available, here and there in a few other chapters too and there is little in regard to this matter, by way of counsel in the third part.

So much has been said about the lack of homogeneity in the work; the components do not contribute to a rounded, homogeneous work of art. We have also seen that this state of affairs is mainly contributed by the third part on 'love'. Now, a close examination of

the verses in this part reveals the starting conclusion that there is very little that is original in this. Most of this has been stated, with better effect, in the *Kuṟuntokai* and *Naṟṟiṇai.*

In the first two parts, Tiruvaḷḷuvar reveals a brilliantly original mind. Even where he takes up the germ of ideas from earlier works like the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* and from folk sayings, he embellishes it with an important element of wisdom from his own experience and cogitation. In every case, in every stanza in these parts, we see a gifted thinker, wise beyond reckoning, who has something very deep and of the widest application to say, which, astoundingly, is not to be dismissed as visionary but is eminently practicable for a man of courage and sound moral training.

One cannot, alas, say the same thing of the *kāmattuppāl.* Most of the concepts and pictures and condensed episodes that find a place here have been dealt with in the *akam* works of the Eight Anthologies and a good critic will not hesitate to declare that they have mostly been said in a better manner than in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ.* The vital factor in *Caṅkam* love poetry is the highly suggestive background called *mutal-* and *karup poruḷ*; we have said a good deal about how these symbols work wonders in the short *Kuṟuntokai* verses to evoke the desired emotional state. In the extremely condensed canvas of the *kuraḷ* metre, ideally suited to carry aphorisms and moral and worldly counsel, there just is no room to accommodate these symbols; and Tiruvaḷḷuvar has largely ignored them; this has resulted in a sad impoverishment of the emotion content. If he wanted to write love lyrics and he had thought up some original poetic situations, Tiruvaḷḷuvar could well have chosen a longer metre and written a separate work, not forming a part of the guidelines book.

But as he had done neither and the *kāmattuppāl,* in the *kuṟaḷ* metre, forms an integral part of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ,* the genre critic has, regretfully, to pass the judgment that though great in parts, it is noṭ

a homogeneous literary work where each component is organically related to the others and to the entire unit.

Genre criticism sometimes throws up unanticipated results. It is, in part, due to the fact that this school of literary criticism is not the entire thing, it has a tendency to look at products from a particular slant. The fact that some of the judgments are unanticipated is partly also due to the way we have been looking at our literary works all these years. The present writer has been observing for fifty years now how scholars have made it a tradition to select a few stanzas from literary works and talk or write about them in extenso, forgetting the wood for the trees. He has seldom heard or read a passage evaluating a work *as a whole*. This phenomenon is truly Indian, it is not confined to Tamil; for he has seen it in the Sanskrit field too. Reputed pandits and scholars are very prone to quote four or five stanzas even from Sanskrit plays, explain the meaning, dwell over them lovingly and call it a day; a play is a complex structure and comments on its design and structural peculiarities must constitute an essential part of any intelligent critical endeavour. Hence the sense of shock with which some of the results of applying the principles of genre criticism may be received is very much on account of our own traditionally faulty way of looking at literary works.

Temple worshippers (the Vaiṇavas predominantly) are urged not only to look separately at the various limbs of the idol kept decorated for a festival and enjoy their individual beauty; they are encouraged to look at the 'samudaya sobha' (the whole or total beauty); such a view will take into account the proportion of the parts and the way they relate to each other and to the whole. If we had learnt to look at the samudaya sobha of literary works, our judgment on them might have been more rational and healthy.

Now to proceed with the genre criticism of selected works, the *Nālaṭiyār* would come out as a somewhat better integrated work than

the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* . The reason is that the Jain poets did not attempt to portray love in all its moods as Tiruvaḷḷuvar has done, They confined themselves to the job of laying down precepts about sex life as they laid down precepts about wealth and possessions and all other aspects of worldly life. There is a small section *kāmattuppāl* added at the end wherein, part of the space is taken up in describing the ways of harlots as befits a proper work on morals. A few stanzas (15 to be exact) unfortunately, describe the various moods or states of love *(tuṟais)* presented in the version of the characters. This part is definitely incongruous in relation to the rest of the work and warps the favourable picture one forms of it as a well-integrated work. It may be noted that this work, too, shows the same divisions as the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* (into *aṟam, poruḷ* and *kāmam*), indicating how strong had been the influence of even less-than-brilliant ideas from the Sanskrit world.

The Cilappatikāram

Cilappatikāram should engage the attention of the genre critic on account of its overweening importance as the pioneer among the *kāppiyams* and one of he best among them. At the time it was composed there was no clear definition of a *kāppiyam* in Tamil, for the best of reasons-that this was the first work of its kind and grammar always follows literature, never precedes it. In fact, even in Sanskrit there could not have been many *kāvyas* to serve as a model for Iḷaṅkō, unless we accept the highly improbable late dates suggested for his opus.

Hence we can assume two sets of criteria or objectives for this, the first *kāppiyam* in Tamil. One set of objectives is of a general nature applicable to all epic poems anywhere in the world; they are that it should primarily induce pleasure, it should have love as its motif, its canvas of treatment should be broad, it should have a cohesive structure, its tone should be elevated and style dignified. And the work should be free of inappropriateness and un-

reasonability. The other set of objectives is furnished in the *patikam* or prologue to the poem itself. It is not known who composed it, it is not even certain how authentic it is. For one thing, it refers to Iḷaṅkō in the third person. But its style is dignified and there is an irresistible air of authenticity about it. The *patikam* categorically states that Iḷaṅkō expressed a desire to establish the truth of three concepts through the agency of a leg-ornament - viz, that the moral code punishes any swerving from the path of justice on the part of the rulers, that the highest beings laud a woman of the spotless chastity and that the actions performed in earlier lives take visible shape and force the doer to enjoy or suffer their results.

To a keen student of Iḷaṅkō's *kāppiyam* it would be clear that all the general objectives have been amply fulfilled in the work. It induces great and lasting pleasure to the reader; of this there can be no doubt at all. Love is its prime motif; and it is not a routine love poem either, for, there are two bipolar love situations dealt with in it - Kōvala<u>n</u>-Mātavi and Kōvala<u>n</u>-Kaṇṇaki, Its canvas of treatment is quite broad. In fact the story is set, in part, in each of the three kingdoms of the Tamil land, thus making it uniquely a story that belongs to the whole of the land,. This is spatial canvas; in regard to the characters, there is a wonderfully wide range from kings and queens, through wealthy traders to the humblest cowherds and hunters, to prostitutes, lechers, goldsmiths and executioners. But, despite the appearance of characters drawn from the lowest level of society and of criminals and villains, the tone is always elevated and the style exudes great dignity. Iḷaṅkō does not stoop to the level of certain other poets by talking ill of other religions; in fact, as we have already noted, he displays a wonderful spirit of tolerance towards others, a spirit that is rarely met with in the annals of man. This tolerant attitude of the poet enhances the tenor and dignity of the poem.

In the list of general objectives we have chalked up, we have included one that speaks about a cohesive structure. This is not an

easy one to fulfil and we have seen how some works regarded as great fail to fulfil it. In the *Cilappatikāram*, we are led on to the episode of Kōvalan̲ getting killed, Kaṇṇaki burning Maturai and the Cēra king building a temple for her as the goddess of chastity from the earliest scenes of the *kāppiyam*. Kōvalan̲'s marriage and his very brief overtures of love to Kaṇmaki are dismissed in a few lines and his getting ensnared by the brilliantly accomplished Mātavi harbingers a tragic series of events culminating in the execution of the hero and the raising of a temple for Kaṇṇaki. For, despite the purity of Mātavi's love for Kōvalan̲, she accepts all the expensive presents brought to her by him and he gets impoverished to such a point that only Kaṇṇaki's leg ornaments are left with her. Kōvalan̲ does not want to continue living in the city in penury, where his forefathers had been leading citizens for generations. He proceeds to Maturai to start a new life and in attempting to sell one of Kaṇṇaki's leg ornaments he gets caught in the web of villainy spun by a scheming goldsmith and gets executed.

King Ceṅkuṭṭuvan̲ gets so inspired by the story of Kaṇṇaki who ascended to heaven from his territory that he proceeds north and defeats the Aryan kings there and brings back stones from the Himalayas with which he builds a great temple to the goddess of chastity. Actually he makes the defeated kings Kan̲aka and Vicaya carry stones on their head on the journey back. As Mātavi's singing of a suggestive song (*Kān̲arpāṇi*) roused suspicions about the purity of her love for him, he left her for good and thus starts the long chain of events leading to the Cera king bringing stones from the north to build the temple. Hence, the poet connects up the events in a cause-and-effect chain in the most telling manner in these words, put in the mouth of Māṭalan̲, the brahmin.

The song which the damsel Mātavi sang
Precipitated a terrific stress

On the crowned heads of Kaṉaka and Vicaya! *(6)*

(Cilampu: Vañci)

It is a neat and brilliant statement, emphasising the structural homogeneity of this excellent poem. It also proves true the third statement about the power of destiny acting on the results of one's actions which we have listed under the specific objectives; the long-term plan of destiny has been indicated in a flash in this statement showing how the incident happening in the 1st canto has an inescapable result described at the end of the book in the 3rd canto. Only a great poet with an instinctive feel for structural wholeness can accomplish all this with such consummate ease.

The tragic end is also justifiable as "the wages of sin is death"; a person who had so far gone into an illegitimate relationship with a courtesan cannot escape the consequences of his act. Kōvalaṉ's infatuation for Mātavi which constitutes the central point of the poem may be justified, physically, by the great charm and the array of accomplishments of the courtesan, trained in coquetry. But there is too, a psychological factor involved. Kaṇṇaki is a moral paragon, the repository of all womanly virtues, the shining beaconlight of chastity who got deified on her ascending to heaven. Such a woman is more fit to be worshipped than loved as a wife. Kōvalaṉ must have felt uncomfortable with her, unsure of himself; he himself was "a man about town", who had no uncomfortably high moral values; he felt far more at home in the company of Mātavi. A similar situations arose in the life of Kāraikkāl ammaiyār who herself was like Kaṇṇaki, a saint of elevated mind for whom even Lord Siva expressed high regard. So, Paramatattaṉ feeling unequal to the task of dealing with her as her husband left her for the high seas and on return, married in ordinary girl more suited to be a wife; and when Kāraikkāl ammaiyār is brought to him by zealous and anxious relatives, he bows down to her in the company of his second wife, as a saint fit to be worshipped.

Why did the Pāṇṭiya king order Kōvalaṉ to be killed without enquiry? He was a just king and this judgment would not normally be rational and justifiable in a creative work. And whatever is not rational, if found in a creative work destroys its appeal. Here, the poet justifies the hasty judgment of the king very convincingly. Earlier the king had displayed too great an interest in the performance given by some actresses and the queen, feeling an attack of jealousy left the court feigning head ache. The king understood that it was a tiff and was most anxious to mollify her. She had lost her leg-ornament earlier and when the cunning court goldsmith reported that the thief had been found in possession of the queen's jewel, the king was most desirous of returning the favourite jewel to the queen and thus soften her towards himself. His love-lorn state, his anxiety at the queen's dudgeon, the realisation by him that the leg ornament will prove a very effective mediator all made him less cautions and more impatient than usual. Even then he could have ordered his men to retrieve the jewel and arrest the culprit; destiny, the poet points out, made him say, "Kill the thief and bring back the ornament!". Those who go through the passage will be able to see how these highly perverse orders were issued at a moment when the king did not have complete control of himself. These orders are not justified, certainly; but one understands how human judgment can fail during times of unusual stress.

Coming to the specific objectives, we find all of them fulfilled in the most natural, uncontrived manner. The unjust king of Maturai was grievously punished. the paragon of chastity deified and destiny triumphant at the end. The last receives excessive emphasis here as all Jains believe in the inexorability of the decrees of fate. The most interesting part of the *patikam* from the literary viewpoint is where it says that all these three principles get elucidated through the leg ornament acting as the prime-mover.

For, consider the role played by the *cilampu*, the leg ornament of Kaṇṇaki and of the Pāṇṭiya queen, too. The first time an arresting mention is made of this jewel is when, finding Kōvalaṉ depressed, Kaṇṇaki wrongly concludes that it was the paucity of valuable things in the house with which to present Mātavi that was the cause of his depression and most magnanimously offers her leg-ornaments to be taken by him to Mātavi. Kōvalaṉ tells her affectionately that he would go to Maturai with her and sell a leg-ornament of hers to form the capital with which he intended to earn wealth by trading. So this ornament figures prominently at the turning point in the story, incidentally convincing Kōvalaṉ how matchlessly magnanimous Kaṇṇaki could be- the Kaṇṇaki he had so grievously wronged.

In Maturai, the *cilampu* plays a devastatingly dominant role. Kōvalaṉ goes out to sell Kaṇṇaki's precious possession and thereby offers himself as a pawn in the cunning goldsmith's hands. The villainous craftsman had stolen the queen's leg-ornament and sees in Kōvalaṉ an admirable scapegoat on whom to blame the theft. Kōvalaṉ gets killed on the orders of the impetuous king who was anxious to return the queen's stolen jewel to her and thus mollify her. Finally the raging Kaṇṇaki proves Kōvalaṉ's innocence by dramatically breaking her remaining *cilampu* in the Pāṇṭiya court, an act which directly leads to the death, through broken hearts, of both the king and the queen. The *cilampu* has thus helped the poet to prove true all the three generalised statements made in *patikam*. And through the agency of this ornament the poet has been able to maintain an admirable cogency and artistic homogeneity in the entire work.

The one defect that a genre critic may be forced to point out in this magnificent work is one of wrong proportions. The first two *kāṇṭams* are engaged in telling the stirring story of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki; at the end of the second or *Maturaik kāṇṭam* we reach the tragic climax where the level of sentiment delineation reaches the

highest level in Tamil Classical literature. Ordinarily works of creative art will end at this point, leaving a lasting impression of the emotional impact on the reader.

But the *Cilappatikāram* carries on for some more time; actually a whole *kāṇṭam* is added at the end of the tragic climax though it is the smallest of the three. It should also be conceded that some of the additional matter, dealt with in the *Vañcik kāṇṭam* is really necessary; the second of the three special objectives, the one relating to a chaste wife being honoured by the highest in the land gets fulfilled only here. Also, as we pointed out earlier, some of the pithy statements like the one about Mātavi's song precipitating a terrific stress on the heads of Kaṉaka and Vicaya are found here.

Still, such a long postscript or epilogue (for the *Vañcik kāṇṭam* is nothing more than that) is hardly called for. Much of the space is taken up with the army manoeuvres of the Cēra king which may serve only the limited purpose of underscoring his great zeal for Kaṇṇaki's cause. The report of the spies under Nilaṉ to the Cēra king does not add anything to the central motif nor is the scene called for where Tēvanti, along with the foster mother and girl-friend of Kannaki makes a long journey from Pukār to Vañci via Maturai. What follows after this scene is not at all of the high level maintained by Iḷaṅkō in the earlier *kāṇṭams*; it smacks of the atmosphere of Maṇimēkalai, with supernatural occurrences and the comprehension of what people of the present had been in the previous birth; this adds little or nothing to the impact of the great epic poem and has the serious defect of holding up the end and watering down the high quality. Much of these in the last *kāṇṭam* could have been left out, with much added quality and impact to the work. But perhaps the Jain element of Iḷaṅkō's personality got the better of the poet; it is also possible that a sense of brotherly feeling and of local patriotism urged him, against his inbuilt sense of proportion and propriety to sing a few extra lines about the martial and other glory of his brother, the king

of the Cēra land. Still, despite this defect, the work comes out triumphant from the (rather ruthless) microscopic examination of genre critics as a work that is consistently homogeneous with every part (with small exceptions) related organically to each of other and to the whole.

The Cintāmaṇi

In the chapter on early epics, the critical remarks passed about *Cintāmaṇi* will hold good here as they pertain to the loose structure of the work, rather like the Odyssey where the hero goes through a series (not a system) of adventures connected to each other through the thinnest of threads. It is a great poem by a poet with a compelling power of description and a great repertoire of diction and a variety of metres. Still, it cannot be denied that the many romantic adventures in which Cīvakan̲ is involved are not organically related either to each other or to the whole. They are loose beads simply wreathed on and a few less of them or a few more will not matter to the impact of the poem as a whole. This is kind of structure (or the lack of it) is very common in India, in the world of Sanskrit, as witness the *Vētāḷapañcavimcati* or the *Tacakumarācarita.* But the adverse judgment of the genre critic is very valid and the wide prevalence of such loosely-structured works does not take away from the point of the criticism.

The Kamparāmāyanam

We now come to Kampan̲'s *Rāmāyaṇam*, beyond doubt, the greatest creative work the Tamils have produced in the three thousand years of their literary history. As the Kampan̲ cult has now engulfed the entire Tamil-speaking world and books and articles and speeches-especially speeches-have dealt with various aspects of Kampan̲'s art, it is adequate if we confine ourselves strictly to a criticism of the work from the genre critic's viewpoint.

It should be stated in fairness that some part of what could be labelled as genre criticism has been brilliantly anticipated by V.V.S. Iyer. This, of course goes to prove not only the innovative genius of Iyer, it demonstrates how some of the criteria of genre criticism have struck others long before this school gave formal shape to them; this latter shows up the universality of some of the criteria applied by this school. The present writer hastens to point out the universality of these criteria in his anxiety to spike the guns of some critics who may find some judgments of this school unacceptable.

Broadly speaking, the admirable story line of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇam* has an in-built homogeneity in it (with one major exception about which we shall talk presently) and as Kampaṉ has adopted this story line, his work enjoys a ready-made homogeneity without his having to sweat for it. This homogeneity has within it, elements of inevitability, reasonableness and a natural quality of acceptable succession of events. For consider how the events follow each other, not merely in time sequence, but in a succession of cause-and-effect relations. For this we have to leave off the *Pālakāṇṭam;* starting from Tacarata's decision to crown Rāma, events move swiftly and meaningfully leading to Rāma's banishment to the forest, followed by Citai and Ilakkuvaṉ.

Their sojourn in the forests without the safety measures and personnel of the palace is very necessary for what follows; Rāvaṇaṉ is able to carry off Citai - a feet he could never have brought off had she been in the palace of Ayōtti. Rāma befriends the monkey chieftain, builds a bridge to Srilanka and after defeating the demon forces and killing Rāvaṇaṉ, he takes Citai to Ayōtti where he is crowned king. The story line moves smoothly, inexorably forward, each incident acting as the cause for what follows stimulating a feeling of inevitability which is characteristic of high art.

The story has been structural tightly in the Sanskrit original and the tight structure has been kept up by Kampaṉ. We do not find

the loose-bead structure of the *Cintāmaṇi* or the Odyssey here. Nor do we find the other kind of laxity that characterises the Sanskrit *Mahābhāratam*. There, a small story is so over-embellished with extraneous matter having little or no organic relationship with the main story that a very respectable theory has been (recently) built up on the basis that originally sage Viyāca wrote a much briefer epic covering only the main story dealing with the Pāṇṭavas and the Kauravās and the embellishments were added by many zealous schools in the following centuries. Here, both in Vālmīki and in Kampa<u>n</u>, the main story dominates over any accretions that may have been added in the course of the centuries.

The relevance of the Pālakāṇṭam

The major exception we referred to earlier is the *Pāla kāṇṭam* in Kampa<u>n</u>. To the superficial observer, no blame attaches to Kampa<u>n</u> as Vālmīki composed a *Pālakāṇṭam* describing Rāma's wedding with Citai and Kampa<u>n</u> followed suit. In the sense that he did not invent the events in the *Pālakāṇṭam*, he is free of blame. But there is more in it that meets the superficial eye.

Many researchers (mostly from the west) strongly feel that Vālmīki did not write the *Pālakāṇṭam* but began his work with the *Ayōttiya kāṇṭam*. This is not a fanciful conclusion; it is supported by a series of formidable facts. The first is that while Rāma is dealt with consistently as a human being in the rest of the work, it is only the *Pāla Kāṇṭam* that describes Tirumāl incarnating Himself as Rāma. Vālmīki clearly believed Rāma to be a human; his work had (and still has) such a tremendous impact on the society, it started deifying Rāma; and subsequent poets wrote up the *Pālakāṇṭam* to give credence and authenticity to this universal belief among the people. This theory cannot be easily set aside, for, there are other arguments that go to support it.

One is that the weddings of the other brothers are also described in the *Pālakāṇṭam*, though their wives are never mentioned in the rest of the work, In fact when Ilakkuvan̲ leaves for the forest, on his own, he is not shown as taking leave of Ūrmiḷa-his wife - a most unsympathetic act that dies not befit one of his culture, if he had a wife, in reality. But more damagingly, Rāma refers to him as unmarried, when declining the advances of Cūrppaṇakai. Rāma will not utter an untruth even for fun. So this destroys the fabric of Ilakkuvan̲ having been married; this goes for the marriage of the other two brothers also.

A very serious criticism (at a higher level) is maintainable against the whole story of how Citai came to be married to Rāma. Her father Can̲akan̲ was not an ordinary man; even if he is not identifiable with the Can̲akan̲ of the Brihataranyaka upanishad - one of the wisest and the most philosophical of kings the country has ever produced - he was a scion of that illustrious line. He receives many tributes touching the nobility of his thinking and his high sense of values, in both the *Rāmāyāṇams*. Is it conceivable that such a high-mined person sets up a wholly physical test for brutal strength to winnow out a husband for his only daughter?

The test was a mere physical one, there was no skill involved, It was not a test which Aruccun̲an̲ and Ulysses passed with distinction, involving very careful aim and extremely skilful archery. Here, it involved merely the breaking of a bow; however weighty it was, what was involved was a mere test of muscular prowess. Could Can̲akan̲ have desired to select a pugilist, a man of rippling muscles with the accompanying serious weakness in the higher faculties (as it usually happens) as the husband of the noble-mined Citai? He could not have foreseen a man of such all round abilities as Rāma breaking it; it was sheer good luck and at least Can̲akan̲ did not deserve it, if he had stipulated such a condition.

Hence, serious doubts arise in all right-thinking men about the authenticity of the whole *kāṇṭam*. There are lesser objections like the preponderance of typically purāṇic-level material in the early part of the *kāṇṭam*, like the descent of the ganga, the birth of Lord Murukan̲ and, above all, the curse of Akalikai. These episodes create a distinctly purāṇic atmosphere which is very different from that we meet with in the rest of the epic.

All these reasons have weighed with the critical-minded writers when they raise doubts about Vālmīki's authorship of the *Pāla kāṇṭam*. In the *carukkam* where an abbreviated version of the *Rāmāyaṇam* is given as part of Sage Nārata's reply to Vālmīki, the story starts at the starting point of *Ayōttiyā Kāṇṭam*, not where the *Pālakāṇṭam* begins. It is therefore quite possible that later writers added the *Pālā kāṇṭam*, sincerely believing that they were enhancing the value of the work.

Whatever the time when this interpolation had been done, it was perhaps millennia before Kampan̲'s time. And generations of poets and pious men have learnt to think of the *Pālakāṇṭam* as a part of the work. So, it may be argued, Kampan̲ merely accepted what had been there for countless centuries and composed the *Pālakāṇṭam* as the first part of the *Rāmāyaṇam*, seeing no reason to excise such an important part of the work of the master.

But the problem is not to be dismissed in this manner. The story of Rāma proceeds from episode to episode in the most natural manner, not only in the time sequences but in cause-and-effect sequence, as we have seen earlier, starting from the *Ayōttiya kāṇṭam*. The story of how Rāma got married, described in the *Pālakāṇṭam* it is not, obviously, in that cause-and-effect sequence. it is, of course, necessary that Rāma is married, before he goes to the forest, But this fact could be mentioned casually in the first *paṭalam* of the *Ayōttiyā kāṇṭam*. A whole long *kāṇtam* is certainly not needed for this, with

all its improbable elements and purāṇic incidents none of which has any impact whatsoever on the rest of the story.

Even if Vālmīki had allowed himself to write the *Pālākāṇṭam* (which, to the present writer, is highly improbable), Kampaṉ with his wonderful gifts of judgment should have excised them and summarised the *Pālākāṇṭam* into one *paṭalam*. There have been many playwrights in Sanskrit who have composed plays on the Rāma theme. While most of them have made the mistake of including Citai 's wedding in their interminably long plays rendering them totally unstageworthy, there have been some like Caktibhadra and Bhasa who have steered clear of this pitfall and dramatised the other part. Bhasa's *Pratimānāṭakam* starts at the point of Kaikēyi's adroit manoeuvre resulting in Rāma getting banished to the forests. With this dramatic beginning the play picks up tempo very fast and this play has turned out to be wonderfully stageworthy. Caktibhadra chose the second turning point in the story for his starting point - where Cūrppaṇakai sets her evil eyes on Rāma's person and events roll out very fast, ending in Rāma's coronation. Both these are natural starting points for a play and their choice betokens an excellent judgment on the part of the poets. Bhasa is particularly to be commended for his omission of the events described in the *Pālākāṇṭam* when writing his *Pratimānāṭakam*. While this is so, none of the plays which start with Citai's wedding ever seems to recover from this initial disadvantage of an unconnected event, one not organically related to the rest of the material. The best examples are Bhavabhuti's *Mahāvīracaritam*, Murari's *Anargharāghavam*, Jayadeva's *Pracannaraghavam* and Rajacekara's *Pālaramayaṇam*. [1]

In the same manner as Bhasa, Kampaṉ could have just excised the ponderous *Pālakāṇṭam*, making a mention of Rāma's wedding in the early *paṭalams* of the *Ayōttiya kāṇṭam* with which he could have begun his work. Kampaṉ lived in a very conservative society at an extremely conservative time and the ordinary Tamil (as the ordinary Indian) loved stories of weddings and Citai's wedding is excellent

gallery material. Despite all this, Kampaṉ should have resisted the temptation and epitomised the story in a few verses.

What Kampaṉ did actually do was a far cry from this. He let his judgment stray so far as to permit the fattening of this unrelated episode into a major *kāṇṭam. Nāṭṭuppaṭalam* and *Nakarappaṭalam* are deemed necessary at the beginning of every Tamil *kāppiyam;* they could have been written and prefixed to the *Ayōttiya kāṇṭam*, Starting with these, however, Kampaṉ goes on his tardy way, dwelling lovingly on the story of Rāma's birth after describing the performance of the sacrifice in considerable detail. Then the sage Kaucika arrives on the stage asks for and gets the two princes and takes them to Canakan's palace where Rāma breaks the unlikely bow.

At this stage Kampaṉ probably felt the pace to be too fast! In an incredible passage of over 250 verses, he describes the march of Tacarataṉ and his army to Mitilai to participate in the wedding. Kampaṉ's poetic personality was such that he would not waste descriptive passages like this without squeezing from them some literary benefit. The present writer has shown in his critical work, "*Kampaṉ Kāṭṭum Kālam*" how the poet manages to reinforce the level of the sentiment through the agency of such descriptive passages. It is all very adroitly done, there is no denying it. But still such extremely lengthy passages add fat to an already heavy *kāṇṭam*, the literary utility of which is very much in doubt.

The size of the Yutta kāṇṭam

If this is how Kampan begins his opus, it is with the same unliterary tardiness that he brings it to a close. The *Yuttakāṇṭam* with its 4309 verses occupies 42% of the whole work! In order to help the reader to appreciate what a lop-sided proportion this figure represents, let us consider some facts.

Rama is not pre-eminently a warrior, spoiling for a fight. There are some local heroes of folklore like Palavēcañ Cērvaikkāraṉ who were

only fighters and war was their only medium of self-expression. It is wrong, too, to assume that Tirumāl incarnated Himself as Rāma only to kill Rāvaṇan̠ and Kumpakarṇan̠ It was one of the purposes, not the only one; and the present writer, after extensive acquaintance with Sanskrit works on the subject of avatārams believes that the extirpation of villainous elements is the lesser of the purposes. The more important purpose is the succouring and the benefitting of the good and pious people. This is why He comes armed with a number of positive qualities like compassion, accessibility and an attractive personality.

There are hundreds of references strewn through-out the work that speak about these benevolent qualities of Rāma. When he befriends Kukan̠ and tells him he is a fifth brother to him, when he accepts Vīṭaṇan̠ as an ally despite advice to the contrary by his war council, Rāma displays qualities of benevolent friendliness and compassion and a capacity for forgiveness. Hence the allotment of 42% of the total number of stanzas to the war with Rāvaṇan̠ is totally undeserved; this part of the work is very much overdone, as any intelligent student realises while reading it.

Some poets love to portray war scenes and they have the temperament for it. Villiputtūrar is identified by tradition as a war-poet who sang the war passages (*Pāratam* is redolent with them) in a very convincing manner. Perhaps Kacciyappa Civācāriyar, too, was good at depicting battle scenes and this talent found excellent application in the *Kantapurāṇam*. Kampan̠ had no such flair and, in truth, his poetry in the *Yuttakāṇṭam* is of a lesser calibre than elsewhere. What, then, prompted him to devote such an overweening proportion of verses to the war in Srilanka?

The epoch in which Kampan̠ lived cannot be described as the Heroic Age. Probably the *Caṅkam* period can be described as such. But a point missed or misunderstood by many is that, though *Caṅkam* poems refer to war frequently, they seldom describe the course of a

battle in detail. Victories were worn by the heroes of the *Caṅkam* age as medals on their person and poets referred to their patrons as "the conqueror of Takaṭūr" and "the victor of the battle at Talayālaṅkāṉam". Kampaṉ along with Villi and Kacciyappar proceeds to give an arrow-by-arrow description of the war (similar to the ball-by-ball commentary of cricket matches of today) which is wearisome and which seems all unnecessary, very much less needed in Rāma's story than elsewhere.

Kampaṉ took the story and the main character patterns and the sentiments and the central motif from Vālmīki's pioneering work. Vālmīki does not devote more than 22% of his work to the *Yuttakāṇṭams*. Kampaṉ seems to have gone for beyond his model in fattening the *Yuttakāṇṭam* to its present obesity, wholly on his own.

Admittedly there are important things to be said in the last book of the work. Vitaṇaṉ's surrender, one of the loftiest passages in all literature occurs here. The bridge-building effort of the monkey army, the various stages of the war certainly need telling. The party headed by Rāma then returns to Ayōtti where Rāma is crowned king; the coronation would need some description. But there is no reason why the poet should have needed more than a 1500 stanzas to cover all these episodes adequately. In many ways the *Ayōttiya kāṇṭam* represents the heart of the epic. It is full of stirring scenes, it contains the high point of Rāma's sublime acceptance of his banishment; there is so much story to be told in it. But the whole thing has been adequately managed in 1200 stanzas, perhaps the most quoted among the ten thousand stanzas of the work. Why did Kampaṉ need 4309 stanzas to describe this sanguinary part of the career of incarnate God?

The puzzle is not easy to resolve. Perhaps further research will uncover special reasons for this dis-proportionate importance to the war in the work. The genre critic will definitely pass an adverse judgment on this lack of a sense of proportion on the part of the poet. Perhaps he got carried away by the martial glory of his hero and his

wonderful qualities of judgment and an awareness of proportions were lulled for the time being.

If we allow about 1500 stanzas for a proper *Yutta kāṇṭam* and 250 stanzas as a maximum for 3 or 4 *paṭalams* (to be prefixed to the *Ayōttiya kāṇṭam*) for the customary descriptions of the country and the city and the wedding of Rāma with the *Pālakāṇṭam* omitted, we are left with a *kāppiyam* of only 6500 stanzas. This would be all the better and the work all the headlhier for having shed the tremendous amount of fat of 3800 stanzas which add little and take away much from the work as a whole. Reflect, gentle reader, how much easier to print, to buy, to handle and to read this shortened work that would have lost little or none of its impact through the shedding of the excess matter. The trimmed down epic would have far greater tempo, it would prove far more interesting to read; and none of its epic qualities would have been lost, unless someone thinks that a fatiguing drag is one of the desirable epic qualities.

If we forget the excess fat in the first and the *last kāṇṭams*, the story proceeds beautifully with each part being integral to the progress and related to all others and to the whole. Most of the non-central episodes (except the one where the monkeys under Anumaṉ go down to the underground empire of Cuyampirapai) also have something to contribute to the sentiment or to the character pattern of the leading personae. In all the emotion-filled episodes, Kampaṉ is found to have delineated the exact amount of emotion, no more, no less, the supreme artist in him has stood guard over any runaway tendencies in this direction. He does not allow moral sermons like that from Vaciṭṭar to exceed the limit beyond which it becomes inartistic and unnecessary. The *Ayōttiyā* and the *Cuntara kāṇṭams* which are of vital importance to the work have been dealt with in a masterly manner without any overwriting anywhere.

The art of characterisation reaches perfection in the hands of Kampaṉ. In fact, in the case of classical poets, charaterisation seems

to receive a secondary emphasis; mostly, classical characters are delineated as the embodiments of all conceivable virtues with no shortcomings whatsoever. This has two drawbacks, at least; one is that the picture loses realism as such perfection of character is not to be seen, this side of the grave; the second is that the characters can seldom be distinguished as all of them look alike. Kampaṉ takes great care in vesting the characters with a human touch. His Rāma is a triumphant product of a master poet, who displays human qualities that endear him to the reader as his own, despite the halo of incarnation. The way his character pattern has been distinguished from that of Parataṉ has already been indicated. Kampaṉ's personae all add to the sentiment contents and stimulate the progress of the story in the most natural manner, thus reinforcing the homogeneity of the whole work.

We had the institution of *araṅkēṟṟam* in those days and Kampaṉ had to face the scholars of the day and answer all their questions before his work could be accepted by the academy. It is clear that these scholars objected to single words and phrases here and there; they were not practised in the art of taking a whole view of the work. One wishes that such a view had been taken at the time of the *araṅkēṟṟam* of the *Rāmāyaṇam* and the scholars assembled had raised the question of the serious disproportions in the work. If this had happened and Kampaṉ had rectified the defects, we would have had as perfect a work of art as human mind can devise.

The Periyapurāṇam

The comments offered earlier on the *Periyapurāṇam* are, in part, from the viewpoint of genre criticism. The *Periyapurāṇam* is clearly not a centralised homogeneised work. The effort made by the talented author to give it a central organisation by making Cuntaramūrtti Nāyaṉār, the hero has not succeeded in resolving this problem. For, most of the saints whose life and work are described had nothing to do with Cuntarar at all; they lived hundreds of years before him, in fact.

A.Ca. Ñāṉacampantaṉ in his brilliant research work *Periyapurāṇam, Ōr Ayvu* to which a reference has been made earlier makes a valiant attempt to show that this is centrally organised, being a work on service (*toṇṭu*); all the saints delineated in it were servants of God and they believed in service. This is not acceptable as this motif cannot organically bind diverse accounts of people born at different times in many different towns and villages of the Tamil land. If A.Ca.Ñā.'s principle is accepted, *Cintāmaṇi* can be regarded as a centrally organised, homogeneous work with romance as the central motif binding all the separate adventures of the hero together. And the Odyssey itself could be considered as integrated under the central motif of "adventure". The judgment in these matters is subjective but is not necessarily whimsical, on that account. And the *Periyapurāṇam* does read like a series of extremely well-written but different narratives; it is not one book, it is in actuality, a cluster of *purāṇams.*

The feeling of organic integration and of homogeneity can be created through a continuous story (not a cluster of incidents) where all events move inexorably towards a single consummation. It is very much the product, again, of a few characters who react to one another naturally and out of these interface reactions arises a meaning that gives delight. If fresh characters are introduced every now and then and the previous ones totally left behind and the new ones introduced are again forsaken for a fresh set of new characters, as it happens in the *Periyapurāṇam*, homogeneity disappears, there can be no sense of organic integration in the work. We discussed some possible ways in which such a central organisation can be strengthened in Kampan's *Rāmāyaṇam.* There are no possible ways through which *Periyapurāṇam* can be centrally organised to yield homogeneity; the very nature of the enterprise defeats all such endeavours. In that sense Kampaṉ could be blamed for neglecting an opportunity to set right this shortcoming in his work; Cēkkiḻār is blameless in the matter.

The two Naḷakāppiyams

There is a legend that Ativīrarama Paṇṭiyan's *Naiṭatam* was criticised by his brother's scholarly wife who compared it to the position of hunting dog; it goes forth eager, full of interest, to the hunt but returns home listless; so too, the work starts off well but the interest is allowed to flag in the second half. This may very well be true and this can be the aptest genre criticism on the work. As we have pointed out earlier, the second half is full of story value and has tremendous potential for pathos. Unaccountably this has received shabby treatment from the talented poet who showed so much promise in the first half. The charge of a lopsided sense of porportion and lack of homogeneity can certainly be laid at the poet's door. Such works can, at best, be read in selections as the whole does not have the essence of wholeness.

But Pukaḻēnti's *Naḷaveṇpā* passes the genre critic's tests with flying colours. It is amazing how, in those spacious days when people were not in a hurry, a poet could compose the material for a long epic into such a tidy, condensed and homogeneous poem that is a sheer joy to read. We come across minor poems of comparable and even lesser length; but to confine the material for a full-fledged *kāppiyam* into a poem of less than 500 stanzas which gives the reader a sense of artistic repletion takes a man of genius. Some lesser works like the *Alli aracāni mālai* are ascribed to Pukaḻēnti. It is almost certain he did not compose them. His fame rests securely on this finely integrated gem of a poem that scoffs at the assaults of diverse critical schools.

The Villipāratam

We are in a similarly happy position to return a very favourable verdict on *illipāratam* from the viewpoint of genre criticism. Villi must be commended on producing a neatly integrated poem so different from the megatherion of a Sanskrit original which is more a library

than a single, co-ordinated work. Nothing prevented him from importing into Tamil all that extraneous matter in Viyāca's original, except Villi's own fine artistic sensibilities. From an overall consideration of total poetic merit Villi ranks lower than Kampaṉ, quite obviously; but Villi has stolen an advance over his celebrated peer in integrating his work better and trimming off excess fat.

The minor Pirapantams

We can now take a quick look at the world of minor *pirapantams*. Here, owing to the existence of a great variety of genres, it will be necessary in each case to examine the nature, the potential and the prevailing spirit of each genre to see if they have been respected and worked up to, in the works belonging to it.

The *kalampakam*, as a genre, is peculiar; it looks an unlikely mixture of both *akam* and *puṟam* modes. No particular metre is fixed for it, as in many cases it is fixed. Even the number of verses seems to be largely unregulated-which is an unusual phenomenon in a land of rule-happy grammarians. But, in practice, it comes in handy when praising a king or the deity. The *akam-puṟam* admixture allows of a certain welcome variety which we enjoy in works like the *Muttoḷḷāyiram*, which must have acted as an inspiration for the hatching out of this genre. *Nantikkalampakam* is the best example for this genre. As this genre is free from finely regulated rules and conditions this work can be considered to have passed the genre critic's judgment, too. Where poets start writing *kalampakams* on saints and gurus, the critic is apt to look askance at them. For neither the modes of physical prowess nor of love can be directly applied in their cases and the poet has to bend the modes to suit the saint and the guru. *Kalampakam* is clearly one of those worldly genres not to be pressed into service for spiritual purposes. Such an attempt debases both the guru and the genre.

While the *kalampakam* has some *puṟam* modes included in it, *kōvai* is a wholly *akam* work with all the possible love modes being arranged in the chronological order. This is clearly intended to be composed on an unnamed couple of lovers with the love sentiment getting delineated without a distraction, *Ampikāpatik kōvai* fulfils this ideally and it is no surprise that it ranks as the best of the extant *kōvai* works. All the *kōvai* works that are sung as religious poetry have to contravene the basic spirit and mood of this genre and consequently despite the talent of the poets concerned, the product does not come out as a happy literary creation. In the religious *kōvais* where a saint or a *guru* is the hero, the total inapplicability of this genre is obvious. The spirit of the genre is so markedly romantic, it seems grotesque to use it to laud an elderly *guru* who has sealed off all his five sensory perceptions and purged his personality of all passion. And the alternative practice (which is generally followed) of describing God or the saint as part of the backdrop against which the love career of two unnamed lovers is traced leads to a lack of homogeneity of concepts and a confusion of tones. A tradition was started sometime after the first few works had been composed, to use this genre to laud a chieftain or a king but, fighting shy of involving him in a romantic sequence, they developed a romance between two unnamed lovers in the complacent feeling that they were keeping themselves on the safeside of the *akam* regulations. The rule of the grammarian may thus be conformed to but such works do not produce a homogeneous artistic effect on the reader. The effect is roughly equivalent to that produced by two people talking to you at the same time. The poet is all the time keen to heap praises on his patron from whom he expects a rather handsome largesse, while he has to fill the stanza with some reference to the lovers going through the appropriate mode of love. No one can talk in two voices at the same time and be convincing. *Kōvais* like the Tañcaivāṇaṉ *Kōvai* and those by Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ and his kind suffer from

this trouble.

The *piḷḷaitamiḻ* has been extensively harnessed to sing the praises of all deities enshrined in the remotest villages of the Tamil land. Indeed it must have become a status symbol for a temple (and by simple transference, to the whole village) for the deity to have a *piḷḷaittamiḻ* composed on it. The nature of the component parts of this genre is such that only gods who can be conceived of as children, whom people habitually worship more often as childgods can be fittingly made heroes of heroines of the pieces sung in the medium. From this viewpoint, only Murukaṉ and Kaṇṇaṉ qualify; the best (male) *piḷḷaittamiḻ* works are those composed on these child gods. One can, possibly make an exception in the case of Goddess Mīṉāṭci as the heroine of the (female) *piḷḷaittamiḻ* works. It is against the prevailing spirit of the genre to compose works in it on Lord Siva and Lord Tirumāl. It is absurd to compose them with aged gurus and saints and political leaders who live to a ripe old age and whom most readers know only as old men, as the heroes of the pieces. The genre involves the description of a child's many stages of development with all the immaturities and the tendency to play and to work pranks, even destructive ones like demolishing mud houses; and it is inartistic and amusing to a degree to read verses describing these in relation to the leading lights of society who are held up to esteem and awe.

It is not clear how (presumably) intelligent men with a certain degree of scholarship could so badly judge things that they could sit down to compose *piḷḷaittamiḻ* works on such *gurus* and saints. It is probably a case of the form attaining a benumbing dominance over substance and spirit. The form loomed large in the horizon of the poets during this uninspired epoch and they felt compelled to compose in recognised genres without any thought of their suitability for the subject.

We can make very similar remarks concerning the way the *ulā* has been handled. Beyond doubt, it is a joyous genre without any element of pathos in it. For, consider: most girls of a city (upper age limit : 40 years) allow themselves to fall in love with the king) or the deity coming in procession in the streets and persevere in a pleasantly romantic mood for perhaps the entire afternoon. very few of them, perhaps none will be foolish enough to take this flutter very seriously and make themselves miserably love-lorn on this account; for every one knows that a marriage is impossible. Hence *ulā* is a literary form where there is only joy born of romance without the considerable heartaches that go with it. Thoroughgoing love that is allowed to go its full way is bound to bring sorrows and disappointment in its wake. But this is only a momentary phase of it, cut out of the solid block leaving the pathos out. Hence *ulā* should be handled in a light fashion as a plaything of the hour.

But poetasters will load this light-winged butterfly with religious sermons and philosophical disputation and effectively achieve a two-fold destruction; the light literary form is torn out of recognition and the message is badly delivered, if at all. The whole picture, moreover, of a saintly old man in ochre cloth and head shaven, with an array of laced holy beads around his neck coming in a procession in the streets and all the girls of the area falling madly in love with him is too irreverent to contemplate. It is therefore not clear how poets with a strong religious fervour could even contemplate writing religious works on human *gurus* in this genre. It must be added that towards the end of the period some poets must have begun to realise the ludicrousness of the situation; but still they were too fond of the literary form to let it go; so they compromised by sending out their *gurus* in procession metaphorically with no romantic situation arising. This, of course, takes away the sting which we have been labouring to point out. But it is still unsatisfactory, for a very different

reason; for an *ulā* work without the romantic fall-out is like Hamlet without the prince of Denmark. It falls flat, there is no flavour in it; only the mutilated form remains; there is no substance, no spirit left. Such works cease to belong to the scented land of literature, even though, by sheer force of custom, writers continue to refer to them in their works on the history of literature.

Ūcal or *Ūñcal* is also a very light genre that prescribes little by way of conditions; it is a free literary form that gives the poet a lot of freedom to innovate. But unfortunately works of quality have not been composed in this genre, despite the natural advantages conferred by it.

Paḷḷu and *kuṟavañci* are folk forms and works written in them should not fail to exude the flavour, respectively, of a riverine plain and a mountain slope. In *paḷḷu* genre, there is a natural provision for a quarrel which men of religious bent have gleefully harnessed to bring out the superiority of their particular sect. This will not spoil the spirit of the form as long as the level of the disputation is kept down to that which we can expect to meet with in unlettered peasant women; but often it goes beyond that and sophisticated arguments are put in their mouths, thus warping the spirit of the literary form.

The *Tirukkuṟṟālakkuṟavañci* has been discussed in detail in the 7th chapter. It can be seen that it fulfils the condition of prevailing atmosphere by describing mountains and the tribes that live in them. It fulfils beautifully the basic condition of being a folk work with its 'folksy' diction and similes and the attitude of the *kuṟavan* and the *kuṟatti*. The unequalled popularity of this work which continues to be read and produced on the stage even today is, in no small measure, due to these characteristics. A work is bound to be good if it fulfils, in spirit, the genius of the genre it is cast in.

In the case of modern forms like the short story and the novel, we have discussed the foremost works from the viewpoint of genre

criticism in the 8th chapter. These new forms, developed as a result of western contact are exacting as literary genres; the short story is all form and the writer who disdains to conform to its form comes quickly to grief. So the genre aspect of these forms has been discussed in the chapter within the limitations imposed by the size of the book.

Conclusion

Genre criticism may throw up surprises, it can very well tread on many corns. But it represents a valid viewpoint in literary criticism which must be considered during the assessment of a literary work. And, as we have noted, Indian scholars and even critics have an instinctive tendency to neglect the value of an over-all view and of a study of the parts of a work to see if they are organically integrated with the whole. In this atmosphere, genre criticism can supply the needed antidote, it can restore the proper sense of proportion to the job of literary assessment.

Annexure 1

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THE GENRE OF RELIGIOUS POEMS

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MINOR LITERATURE

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Annexure 2

LIST OF MINOR PIRAPANTAM GENRES

Catakam
Piḷḷaittamiḻ
Paraṇi
Kalampakam
Kōvai
Aintiṇaicceyyuḷ
Varukkakkōvai
Mummaṇikkōvai
Aṅkamālai
Aṭṭamaṅkalam
Anurākamālai
Iraṭṭaimaṇimālai
Iṇaimaṇimālai
Navamaṇimālai
Nāṉmaṇimālai
Nāmamālai
Palcantamālai
Paṉmaṇimālai
Maṇimālai
Pukaḻccimālai
Perumakiḻccimālai
Varukkamālai
Meykkirtti
Kāppumālai
Vēṉilmālai
Vacantamālai
Tārakaimālai
Uṟpavamālai
Tāṉaimālai
Mummaṇimālai
Tāṇṭakamālai
Viravetcimālai
Veṟṟikkarantaimañcari
Pōrkkuceḷuvañci
Varalāṟṟu Vañci
Cerukkaḷa Vañci
Kāñci Mālai
Nocci Mālai
Uḻiñai Mālai
Tumpai mālai
Vākai Mālai
Vātōraṇa Mañcari
Eṇceyyuḷ
Tokaicceyyuḷ

Oliantāti

Patiṟṟantāti

Nūṟṟantāti

Ulā

Ulāmaṭal

Maṭal

Orupā Orupaḵtu

Irupā Irupaktu

Āṟṟuppaṭai

Kaṇpatainilai

Tuyileṭainilai

Peyariṉṉicai

Uriṉṉicai

Peyarnēricai

Urinēricai

Ūrveṇpā

Vilakkunilai

Puṟanilai

Kaṭainilai

Tacāṅkam

Tacāṅkattayal

Aracaṉ viruttam

Nayaṉappāṭṭu

Payōtarappattu

Pātātikēcam

Kēcātipātam

Alaṅkārapañcakam

Kaikkiḷai mālai

Maṇkala vallai

Tūtu

Nāṟpatu

Kulamakaṉ

Tāṇṭakam

Patikam

Catakam

Ceviyaṟiuṟū

Vāyuṟai Vāḷttu

Pavanikkaṭal

Kuṟattippāṭṭu

Uḻattippāṭṭu

Ūcal

Eḻukūṟṟirukkai

Kaṭikai veṇpā

Ciṉṉappū

Virutta Ilakkaṇam

Mutukāñci

Iyaṉmoḻivāḻttu

Perumaṅkalam

Peruṅkāppiyam

Kāppiyam

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